

WOMEN NEGOTIATING THE LOCAL-GLOBAL INTERFACE:

COSMETICS IN SINGAPORE

by

CATHERINE JANE GRIFFITHS

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1992

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Geography

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 1994

© Catherine Jane Griffiths, 1994

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

(Signature)

Department of Geography

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date October 5, 1994.

## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the negotiations that Singapore women make as they traverse an ever-changing landscape that is caught in the local-global dialectic. Through field study and archival research the author investigates the effects of the globalization of the economy on the local practices of women. This thesis includes the global influences of the international division of labour, consumer culture and the media. Balancing the global is the local controls of the Singapore government, through various social mechanisms. The social landscape of Singapore and women's position in the landscape are central to the argument that women are especially affected by the globalization and the local controls. The multiple roles women play as they adapt to rapidly changing images of femininity and womanhood are discussed in the context of the local and the global through the cosmetics industry and the use of cosmetics. The agency of women is discussed as women were found to devise different looks to adapt to the many roles they are asked to play in their daily experiences. Women actively seek out methods to accommodate the changing social landscape in Singapore and cosmetics is one way they take control of their femininity as Singapore experiences the **local**-global dialectic.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Acknowledgment	vii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
Singapore Girl: Mixed Messages	2
Methodology	4
History and Geography of Singapore	8
Global / Local Dialectic	11
Multiple Images of Women	14
Cosmetics and Images	14
<b>Chapter Two: Global Images</b>	<b>19</b>
Globalization and Singapore	20
Processes of Change	20
The Global City and Imaginings	28
Global Consumer Culture	31
Mass Media and Global culture	31
Social Position and Consumer Culture	34
Singapore and Consumer Culture	35
Conclusion	43
<b>Chapter Three: Local Images</b>	<b>45</b>
Local Images	45
Local Controls	46
Politics of Survival	50
Social Status and Women's Place	61
Internalized Values	64
Changing Faces - Political changes and Societal Responses	67
Conclusion	68
<b>Chapter Four: Women and the Social Landscape of Singapore</b>	<b>70</b>
Women in the Social Landscape	70
Social Features	71

Government, Policy and Women	72
Women and The Global Economy	74
Population Policies and Women	79
Education and Women	85
Roles and Images	87
Dual and Triple Roles	88
Women and the Modern Household	89
Conclusion	94
<b>Chapter Five: Cosmetics Industry in Singapore</b>	<b>95</b>
Image Making	95
Globalization of Cosmetics	96
Cosmetics Industry and Singapore	99
The Many Faces of the Industry	104
Women Who Sell Cosmetics	110
Marketing Femininity	115
Conclusion	118
<b>Chapter Six: More than just a Pretty Face</b>	<b>119</b>
The Face	119
Face Value	120
Cosmetics, Identity and Style	121
Global Beauty	126
Beauty in Singapore	127
Power and Beauty	127
Media and Beauty in Singapore	130
The Currency of Cosmetics	131
Conclusion	136
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Reference List</b>	<b>141</b>

## List of Tables

Table 2-1: Average Annual Household Income, 1977/78, 1982/83, and 1987/88	37
Table 2-2: Households with specific Consumer Durables, 1987/88	38
Table 2-3: Household Income, By Housing Type, Quartiles, 1987/88	40
Table 2-4: Consumer Durables Percent Owned, By Housing Type, 1987/88	40
Table 3-1: Percentage of Popular Vote, Various Singapore Elections	48
Table 4-1: Distribution of Female Labour Force By Industry, In Thousands, 1957-1990	75
Table 4-2: Distribution of Female Labour Force, By Industry, In Percentage, 1957-1990	76
Table 4-3: Singapore Labour Force Participation Rates, 1957-1990 (Selected Age Cohorts)	77
Table 5-1: Cosmetics Imports, Total and By Selected Country, In Millions \$\$, 1980-1992	100
Table 5-2: Female LFP and Total Cosmetics Imports, Selected ages and years	102

## List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Singapore Girl, 1990 Advertisement for Singapore International Airlines	1
Figure 1-2: An example of a shopping centre found on Orchard Road	7
Figure 1-3: Map of Singapore and surrounding areas	9
Figure 2-1: The promotion of Singapore as a Global Hub showing the many global connections of the city state.	18
Figure 2-2: The <i>Guess Girl</i> , an image of Global Beauty	33
Figure 2-3: Consumer Price Index and Wage Index, May 1978 = 100	36
Figure 4-1: A Family Planning Poster that supports the current population policy, 1993	81
Figure 4-2: Typical Housing Development Board housing project in Singapore	90
Figure 5-1: Global Cosmetics & Media: <i>Elle</i> , Lancome poster and a Singapore woman	97
Figure 5-2: Skin Care & Colours, Imports & Export Figures, 1980-1992, In Thousands \$S	100
Figure 6-1: Global Brands, <i>Levi's</i> , <i>Armani</i> and <i>DKNY</i> worn by women in Singapore	123

## Acknowledgment

I would first and foremost, like to acknowledge the Canada/ASEAN Centre for supplying me with a travel grant, supporting my travel to Singapore for personal collection of data. I would also like to thank the Singapore office of Canada/ASEAN for all their assistance. The local women's groups were very helpful and generous with their time, permitting me an insight into how women negotiate the many images they received on a personal level and for this I am most grateful. I would like to thank all the persons involved in the cosmetics industry who were always willing to assist me in my work. I would like to extend a special thank you to B. Tan and P. Ong for the extra efforts they went to in assisting my research and in making me feel so welcome. I am especially grateful to Arlene Bastion for making me a part of her life in Singapore. Finally, I would like to thank all the women of Singapore who were frank and open with me in my discussions about their use of cosmetics and their roles in society. Without these intimate looks at daily life my research would have lacked the desired dimensions.

This acknowledgment would not be complete without the recognition of all the support I received from my fellow graduate students, faculty and staff at the University of British Columbia, with special thanks to my supervisor Dr. T.G. McGee.



*We bid farewell before the first glow of youth has faded.*



*Every few years, we make a point of replacing our aircraft with the latest the industry has to offer. In fact, our fleet is known to be the youngest and most modern of any major airline in the world. But perhaps that's not what you'll best remember us for.*

*The youngest, most modern fleet across 5 continents.*

Figure 1-1: The Singapore Girl, 1990 Advertisement for Singapore International Airlines.



## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### Singapore Girl: Mixed Messages

“I want a beautiful girl to pamper me ... that’s why I like traveling on Singapore Airlines.”(*Strait Times* 19/09/1991:4)<sup>1</sup>

In each and every Singapore Airline advertisement a Chinese woman, dressed in a *sarong kebaya* with bright red lipstick, blush and painted eyes, is portrayed as The Asian Woman with her head demurely lowered and just a hint of a smile on her face as she “brings a smile to the face of the world”. One such advertisement reads: “Across four continents of the earth you are an unsolved mystery in a *sarong kebaya*, Who are you Singapore Girl?” (Chapkis 1988:57). Singapore Airlines has focused its advertising campaign on the romantic image of this Singapore Girl (see Figure 1-1) for over a decade, addressing them as gentle hostesses, “caring for you as only they know how”. This woman is the image of the traditional Asian but she is often pictured in front of an airplane, part of the “most modern fleet in the world” very much a part of the global world of air travel. This dichotomy of global and local images can be found throughout the island city of Singapore. The advertisement’s combination of Chinese race, Malay dress and Western cosmetics is an example of the complexity of women’s position in Singapore. The multiple images and the juxtaposition of local and global all influence the cultural perceptions of what is feminine/beauty for Singapore women. The ‘Singapore Girl’ image of femininity has proven to be an effective marketing tool for the airline. This portrayal of the subservient Asian woman is not without detractors: women’s groups in Singapore have opposed the image created

---

<sup>1</sup> This reply is by a business executive when asked why he traveled on SIA in an article entitled “Beauty Before Brains” in the local English language newspaper.

by the airline (Aware 1986, 1988, 1993, Siraj 1987, 1988), which shows that the media created 'feminine' does not represent the reality of most Singapore women's lives (although it represents the socially constructed ideal).

This thesis examines how women negotiate their new perceptions of femininity/ beauty in the modernizing urban landscape of a rapidly developing Asian nation. One set of theories, broadly summarized under the modernization rubric (Chapter 2), sees this process as one of unilinear acceptance of global (modern<sup>2</sup>) values. This research takes another position exploring how women adapt both the global and local values as they negotiate the changing social landscape. Singaporean women formulate bargains between modern/global roles and traditional/ local roles in a city state where global economies and local social structures have an uneasy relationship. One facet of this negotiation is the increased use of cosmetics and the importance of beauty and femininity in society. Women are being encouraged, by the government to develop a domestic role that represents the desired 'feminine' ideal, but they also receive messages from the government to be part of the global city through their education and careers.

Women in Singapore participate in the global network of fashion and cosmetics with access of the same product lines as women in New York, Tokyo or London. But the lifestyle attached to these modern grooming products is only an image, as Singapore women conform to

---

<sup>2</sup> Modern can be defined as of present or recent times and embodying recent techniques, methods or ideas. And as pertaining to the most recent period of development and as a comparative of 'recent' versus 'past', a relative term. Tradition can be defined as an opinion or belief or custom handed down from ancestors, by word of mouth or example, as a doctrine not committed to writing (i.e. theological), as an artistic or literary principle based on accumulated experience or continuous use, as an inherited or established way of thinking, feeling, or doing (a cultural feature preserved or evolved from the past) and as a cultural continuity embodied in a massive complex of evolving social attitudes or behaviors, rooted in the past, exerting pressure on the present. These definitions were derived from the *Dictionary of Human Geography*(1986), *Sociology Dictionary*(1991) *Oxford* (1979) and *Webster's* (1971) dictionaries. In the case of Singapore the modern and the traditional are often placed in opposition to one another, as if one is easily distinguishable from the other. But as can be seen from the above definitions, there is no concrete modern or tradition which can be defined what is modern today will be traditional tomorrow. In this context the word 'tradition' will be used to show images of women found in the past cultures and in the more recent past before independence. 'Modern' will be used to show images of women in the past thirty years of independence.

the standards of the Asian Woman (Lim 1993), as found in the Singapore Airlines advertisement. The cosmetics industry is part of the global spheres of circulation and consumption. Cosmetics are an example of the micro-level compromises and conflicts of identity for women in the evolving social landscape of Singapore. Consequently, this research attempts to understand how women are integrated in the global consumer economy on a personal level:

“The realm of images , fantasy and dreams is shaping young women’s attitudes in Asia today. This cannot be simply summed up under theoretical frameworks such as modernization or westernization; [these] frameworks ignore the important role played by the creation of consumption ‘needs’ in inducing women and men to enter and to remain in the wage labour force.” (McGee 1987:355)

As Singaporean women move between their local and global identities, they use cosmetics as part of their negotiation of this dialectic in the personal sphere. The power of appearance in the ‘modernizing’ world of the Singapore economy and how women reconcile their many roles are the focus of this micro-level analysis women and cosmetics.

### Methodology

This thesis is the culmination of two years of research into the changing roles and identities of women in Singapore. Singapore offers a unique opportunity to observe a rapidly changing social landscape and to witness how women adapt to their multiple and changing roles. With the globalization of the Singaporean economy in 1965 global images of beauty became a part of the local discourses around women and beauty. This research looks at the negotiations women make as they traverse an ever-changing social landscape that is caught in the global/local dialectic.

Women have experienced changes in the desired ideal woman since independence and these changing roles were my first avenue of study. The expansion of the global beauty industry in the 1960s coincided with the changing roles of women in Singapore. As part of this research I

traveled to Singapore in 1993 for three months of personal field research into the lives of women, the penetration of the global beauty industry, and how women deal with the challenges of conflicting messages from global and local sources. The year 1993 was a good period for information gathering on women as local women's groups published three books on women during the time I spent in Singapore.<sup>3</sup> I was able to contact these groups and speak with the women involved in the publication of these books on the multiple images of Singapore women. These groups included the PAP's Women's Wing, the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations and the Singapore Baha'i Women's Committee.

For archival material I was able to access the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) library, the National University of Singapore (NUS) library and the National Library. I would like to thank Dr. S. Siddique for her assistance in my research at ISEAS. The extensive collections of the National Library and NUS on women and Singapore made in depth research possible.

Personal investigation was rewarded with a contact in Aware (the Association of Women for Action and Research), the only women's group which takes a vocal (and an admitted) feminist stance in Singapore. These women are working hard for the recognition of women and for the awareness of issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. This group operates a women's help line, a reference reading room, and free legal advice for women. Through different contacts I was able to meet Singapore women on a one-to-one basis and these women provided me with the most insight into the situation in Singapore.

---

<sup>3</sup> These books are: *A Woman's Place: The Story of Singapore Women*, edited by Aline Wong and Leong Wai Kim (1993a); *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change* edited by Aline Wong and Leong Wai Kim (1993b) and *Voices and Choices: The Women's Movement in Singapore* edited by Jenny Lam Lim (1993) for the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations and Singapore Baha'i Women's Committee.

The second avenue of investigation that I carried out in Singapore was the cosmetics industry. I chose this global industry as an example of women's negotiation of the global/local dialectic in Singapore because of its very visible nature: cosmetics can be seen on most women's faces in each of their multiple roles throughout the island. The global nature of this industry is in the marketing of global beauty ideals to women who are newly adjusting to high rates of labour force participation. The local feminine ideal is composed of these global ideals, traditional ethnic ideals and the government's social ideal of feminine roles.

As Singapore women moved into the global industrial labour force, they have experienced more exposure to the multiple ideals of beauty and femininity. How women use these ideals to negotiate their preferred paths through the social landscape became an area of interest to me as I traveled on public transport and by foot. Through personal observation and conversations, I became intrigued with how women resolve the issues of appearance and the many roles they fill, from the young working woman with a fully made-up face to the young mother who uses few coloured cosmetics at home but will match the younger woman for use in the workplace. Nightlife for singles in Singapore is the same as found the world over, women alter their use of cosmetics to present a more alluring image designed to attract attention.

The shopping strip on Orchard Road is a Mecca for tourists. The duty free status of Singapore makes purchases affordable for tourists and locals alike. The Orchard Road shopping district contains 40 large shopping centers of four to six floors each, filled with both global and local firms (see Figure 1-2). The experience of walking the four miles of retail (2 miles on both sides of the street) space impressed upon me that Singapore was definitely a global consumer centre, and the size of the cosmetics displays (occupying 75% of the ground floor in most large stores) was one way I could see how important cosmetics were to women's identity.



Figure 1-2: A shopping centre on Orchard Road (Singapore Tourist Bd)



△ Indulge in a shopping spree in a modern, well-stocked complex.

My research in Singapore was enriched through the personal interactions with women from all walks of life who participate in the cosmetics world, women who use, sell and market cosmetics. These women were very generous with their time and their experiences, and added another dimension to my research. In addition many persons involved in the global cosmetics firms kindly made time for me in their busy schedules to discuss their perceptions of cosmetics in Singapore.

### History and Geography of Singapore

The global/local dialectic is played out on many stages throughout the globe. In Singapore the political, social, economic and historical circumstances makes this negotiation complex and rapid. The government's promotion of 'proper' roles for women over the past thirty years has converged and diverged with the global images of beauty. In order to assist the reader in understanding the situation in Singapore over the past thirty years a brief summary of the geography and history follows.

Singapore is a small island of only 633 square kilometres located at the tip of the Malay peninsula, one degree above the equator (see Figure 1-3). The island nation is centrally located within Southeast Asia and has offered advantages throughout its history to traders and pirates alike. Singapore is an island nation that was always part of a larger geographic and political structure until 1965. Singapore was purchased in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles as a site for the British East India Company (BEIC) from the sultan of Johore (a Malay state), and in this way the island was integrated in the trading empire of the BEIC. The island was transferred to the British colonial office to form one of the Straits Settlements (with Penang and Melaka) before being merged with the Malay peninsula as a colony of Britain. The Japanese occupation between 1942 and 1945, forever altered Singapore's future, the desire for independence from any overseer was



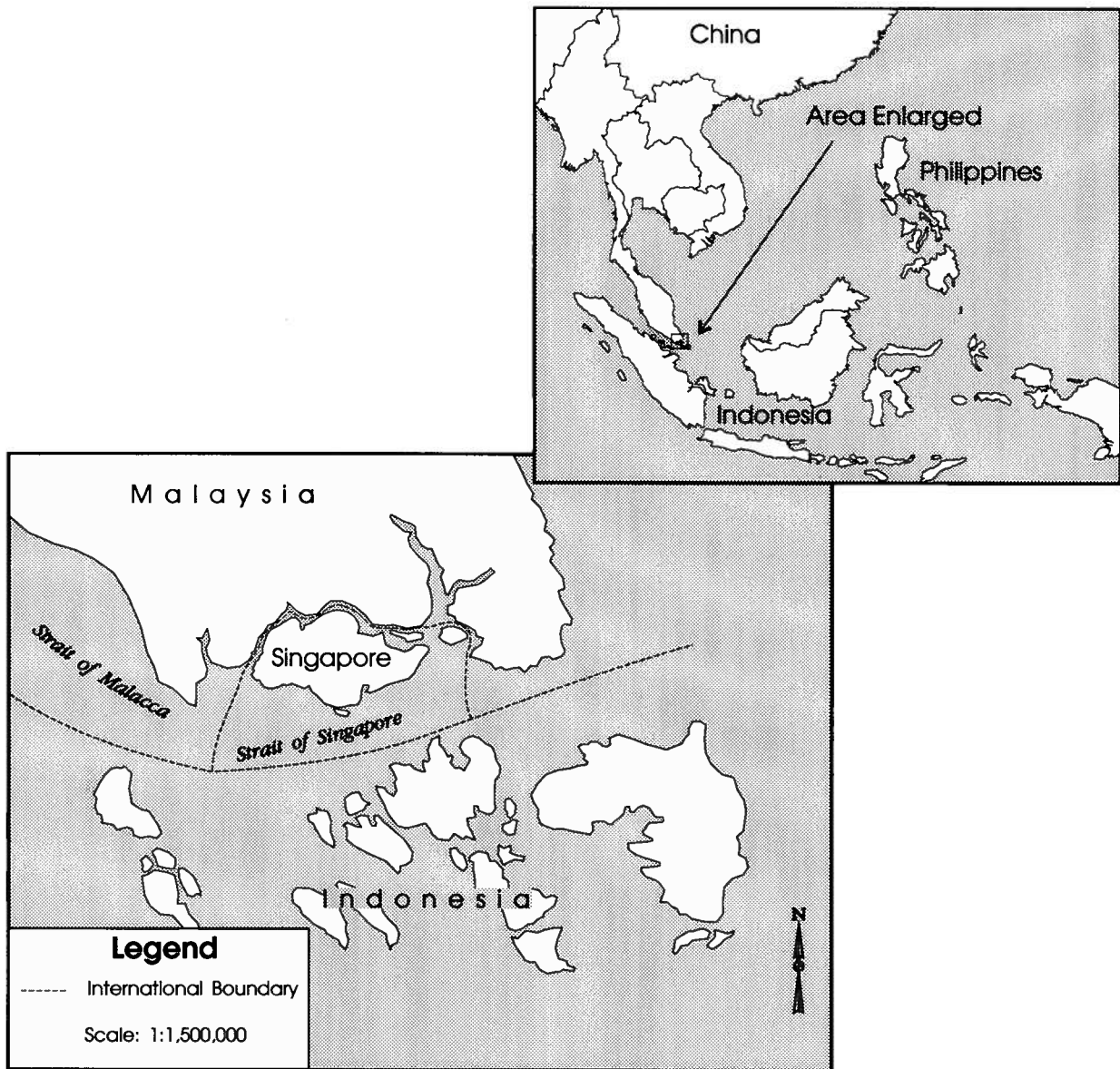


Figure 1-3: Map of Singapore and surrounding area

pursued by the local population until the first Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was elected in 1959. The attempted merger with Malaya in 1963 through 1965 helped harden the independent streak in Singapore and crystallized the need for Singapore to be more global in outlook as they had few resources and a small local market. The answer then was to globalize the newly independent nation while retaining autonomy. As Singapore completes 30 years as an independent nation, the economic success has been miraculous: the physical landscape has been transformed to that of a global city, and the standard of living has improved for all citizens<sup>4</sup>.

The population of Singapore in 1811 was comprised of 100 Malays and an unknown number of local pirates. In the early years of migration the male/female ratio was averaging five to one for the two largest groups: the Chinese and the Indian, who together represented 75% of the population. The ethnic proportions have to 75% Chinese, 15% Malay and 7% Indian and the gender ratios have become balanced but only in the past forty years. The migrants who arrived in Singapore were entrepreneurs or workers seeking to make their fortune and return to their natal country, but enough remained to form a vibrant port city in the centre of Southeast Asia. As a free port, Singapore offered many opportunities in the trade or business sectors and the governing authorities have always practiced a form of governance conducive to business.

The colonial legacy in Singapore goes far beyond trade and location. It involves a synthesis between the traditional and the colonial system. The migrant groups to Singapore broke with old cultural traditions or modified them to their new surroundings and this included the traditional roles of women. When these 'up-rooted' cultural values were practiced in Singapore they were influenced by the British traditions of the colonial rulers. The social impact of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The per capita GNP in 1982 was nine times that of 1960 (Lim and Fong 1986).

colonial structures included an emerging local elite who associated with the British standards of society, including the Victorian ideology of women's 'proper' position. Women were thus redefined from their arrival in the colony. They were neither expected to follow the natal traditions or the British traditions, but were expected to negotiate a new path in the new location.

### **Global / Local Dialectic**

The cities of the world are connected through economic and communication linkages at the same time they must cope with the effects of these linkages on the local level, for:

“at the twilight of the 20th century two phenomena are sweeping the planet: the globalization of economies and the localization and regionalization of politics.”  
(Morris 1994:80)

Singapore is tied to the global system through the economy, transportation and communication networks and through the ideology of 'modernity'. In order to maintain a local control of society and to stop the penetration of unwanted 'western' values the government of Singapore uses a combination of legislation and social engineering to control (and protect) the local from the global.

This micro-level analysis of cosmetics shows the global/local dialectic found in Singapore. The desire to be a global, modern city and yet maintain the local, controlled society creates conflicts for the citizens of this island nation. As the government pursued the global manufacturing investment<sup>5</sup> there was a equally strong pursuit of a modern society based upon the design of the current government. To all appearances Singapore has a modern society complete with home ownership, high quality medical care, and access to all the consumer goods desired. What is not so easily seen are the social costs to the community of the modern society,

---

<sup>5</sup> This investment has been successfully pursued. Singapore attracted 33 billion dollars in foreign development investment between 1981 and 1992, second largest after China in the developing world.

for example: as women were recruited to work in the factories, creating a modern workforce of educated, cheap and controlled workers. This created a need for childcare centres, that had not been experienced in Singapore in the past. This female labour force was imbedded with the feminine docility of the Asian Woman used to market Singapore to the multinational corporations (MNC) (Grossman 1979, Lim 1983, Wong 1983, Salaff and Wong 1984). The success of this new labour force increased the living standards for many Singaporeans over the next twenty years, as the economy globalized and consumption of global goods increased (Salaff and Wong 1984).<sup>6</sup> This push for modernization then was globally oriented with the changes to society aimed at creating the conditions that would entice foreign investment into Singapore.

Chapter two explores this globalization of Singapore by first looking at the global expansion of capital and modernization, and then by looking at Singapore as one of the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs). Other broader influences such as the global consumer culture and the international mass media are explored, as the images of women are intricately tied to consumption and the media's portrayal of beauty. The final section looks at the intersection of global mass culture and the local and the responses to consumer culture.

In contrast to the global influences above, there is a strong local control of the society by the government. Through various legislation the government of Singapore has maneuvered the citizens into a rigid society. The incentives and disincentives for different behaviors have created a community that was de-politicized<sup>7</sup> by the early 1970s (Chan 1975). The local control of the

---

<sup>6</sup> The increase in household income was due in part to more women working (either as daughters or wives) and this aided the transformation of society. Increased labour demands for men were in the construction and civil service, the global jobs were focused on female labour in the production categories with male managers and administrators. (Wong 1983, Lim 1983, Grossman 1979)

<sup>7</sup> With the removal of the opposition politicians by 1965 (for more see Chapter 3), and with an economic focus of all development, and the subordination of ethnic, politics and social change to the economy resulted in a more accepting populace of PAP policy and politics.

unions, wages, education, housing, population growth, the press and other media outlets has created a society that is on one hand exhorted to be a global information society and on the other is admonished for desiring to be global in social (or political) outlook.

This dialectic of global and local has become crystallized in the argument over 'value systems'. The conflict of 'Asian' and 'Western' values has been an issue with the local authorities since the early 1980s, when the PAP (People's Action Party) first suffered a loss in popularity at the polls. The government felt that there was a growing individualism amongst the younger generation who had not know the hardship of the previous generation. The state's rhetoric of survival was not as well received with the younger generation who felt that Singapore's economy and global position was secure. The loss of political support from this segment of the population saw an opening and closing of the government in the 1980s. The creation of core values for the national identity saw the family, and women, as crucial to the retention of the traditional value system with proper respect for authority. The changes to education, population and housing in the 1980s reflected these attempts (to socially construct the 'Asian' values) by the government, but they failed to stop the decline in the popular vote. These policy changes did however manage to formulate a new ideal feminine woman, who places her home and family duties above her work.

Local social and the global economic positioning of Singapore is the focus of the third chapter. The pursuit of a global identity and the retention of local control by the state are part of the conflicting messages in Singapore. The desire to be global and modern, while retaining the local and tradition has created a constant flux of identity for Singaporeans, male and female alike. The intersections of these identities creates the dialectic in which women are negotiating their identities.

### **Multiple Images of Women**

These tensions of global outlook and local control place women in a difficult position of trying to be a part of the globalization and yet they are exhorted to maintain the traditional family arrangements. The local/global dialectic is a 'no win' situation for women as they attempt to be multiple images at once. The 'liberation' of women has created new conflicts on top of old. The Women's Charter of 1961 (see Chapter 4) gave women more control in their marital roles, but with the Charter there is an implicit reminder that women's role is as a wife - there are no women's rights as unmarried in the Charter except for assault (Wee *et al.* 1987, Purushotam 1992). This is but one example of how the government controls the roles for women.

The impact of these multiple identities for women are further defined in the fourth chapter, which focuses on the changing government policy in the past thirty years and the multiple roles women must traverse over their life cycle. The global demand for female labour and the government's demand that 'girls should be girls' place women in the modern setting of work and the traditional setting of family caretaker at the same period of life resulting in many conflicts of identity. A woman's role and identity is tied more to how she looks than ever before as women try to create images which meet these multiple roles in modern Singapore.

### **Cosmetics and Images**

In this social climate of global work and local tradition, women must negotiate the roles as society perceives them: the contented housewife, the career woman, the dutiful daughter, the dynamic university student, and the desirable wife. Bound within these roles are the images of femininity and the ideals of beauty. As women traverse the social landscape, they utilize the beauty ideals to preserve some autonomy and yet this utilization perpetuates the state's positioning of women.

How cosmetics help women to negotiate their multiple identities is the focus of the fifth chapter as it explores the cosmetics industry in Singapore. The global nature of this industry makes is one of the many waves of influence which accompanied the expansion of capital in the 1960s. The feminine aspects of this industry are shown in the section on the women who buy and sell the products. The final chapter shows the connection of cosmetics with identity, beauty and roles for women in Singapore. It contains a section on the currency of beauty in the workplace and the social spheres, as women use their looks to fulfill society's perception of femininity and their perception of themselves.

The advertising and marketing efforts of the global cosmetics firms is matched by the government's advertising and marketing of the preferred roles and images of women in Singapore. From the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) billboards (see Figure 4-1) to the large bus posters, women experience a constant barrage of images. All these images contain women wearing cosmetics in different situations. From these images women attempt to draw out what they perceive is the best 'look' and lifestyle for themselves.

The connection of 'looks' and lifestyles is an integral part of the global consumer culture and the mass media. These global influences are very much in evidence in the landscape of Singapore, from the many Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut outlets to the status symbols of Rolex watches, cellular phones and high end automobiles (for example *BMW* or *Mercedes Benz*). Women's work appearance is not unlike her counterpart in Western work culture. What makes Singapore different is the speed of change of images, the work 'face' is very different from the other roles Singapore women adopt and 'wear' or apply on their faces. The local images of tradition and ethnicity counter these global images and cause tensions as women move along the social landscape of Singapore.

This thesis explores the background to the question of identity and beauty in Singapore. The demand for female labour force participation, the perceived need for more ‘talented’ children, and the problem of an aging population are areas of social engineering that contain preferred images of women and their role in society. As the Singapore government formulates policy in the social realm women find themselves pushed and pulled to alter their identities on three levels - the workplace, the family home and as an individual - to match the desired roles. The use of cosmetics can be shown as a part of women’s negotiation of the local/global conflict imbedded in the modernization process.

The well groomed woman has the ability to use cosmetics to better her career and marriage chances in a highly competitive environment, where women find themselves not only competing **with** men for jobs but **for** men in the marital arena. The images women create, through the use of cosmetics, are in response to the different social, economic and governmental pressures experienced on a day-to-day basis by the women. The social construction of women and femininity/beauty in Singapore is part of the local/ global dialectic at the micro-level. The conclusion of this thesis connects the images and identities of women to the larger issues of the globalization of Singapore and the role of women in the formation of a modern global city state.

The ethnic divisions, the social class divisions and gender divisions separate women into many different categories and roles in Singapore. The constraints of time and the depth of these issues requires me to write in a more general manner than preferred, but this research is but a beginning of research into the ‘modern’ women of the newly developed nations of Southeast Asia.

This thesis represents a preliminary attempt at research into women’s negotiation of the local/global interface in Singapore. This research explores the complex web of politics and the



social structures in Singapore that women travel as they seek a path of compromise between different images of the feminine. The value of beauty and the ability of Singapore women to use cosmetics for personal control demonstrates that women are agents in their own destiny, even as they accept the global images of femininity and beauty.

Singapore,  
a global hub.

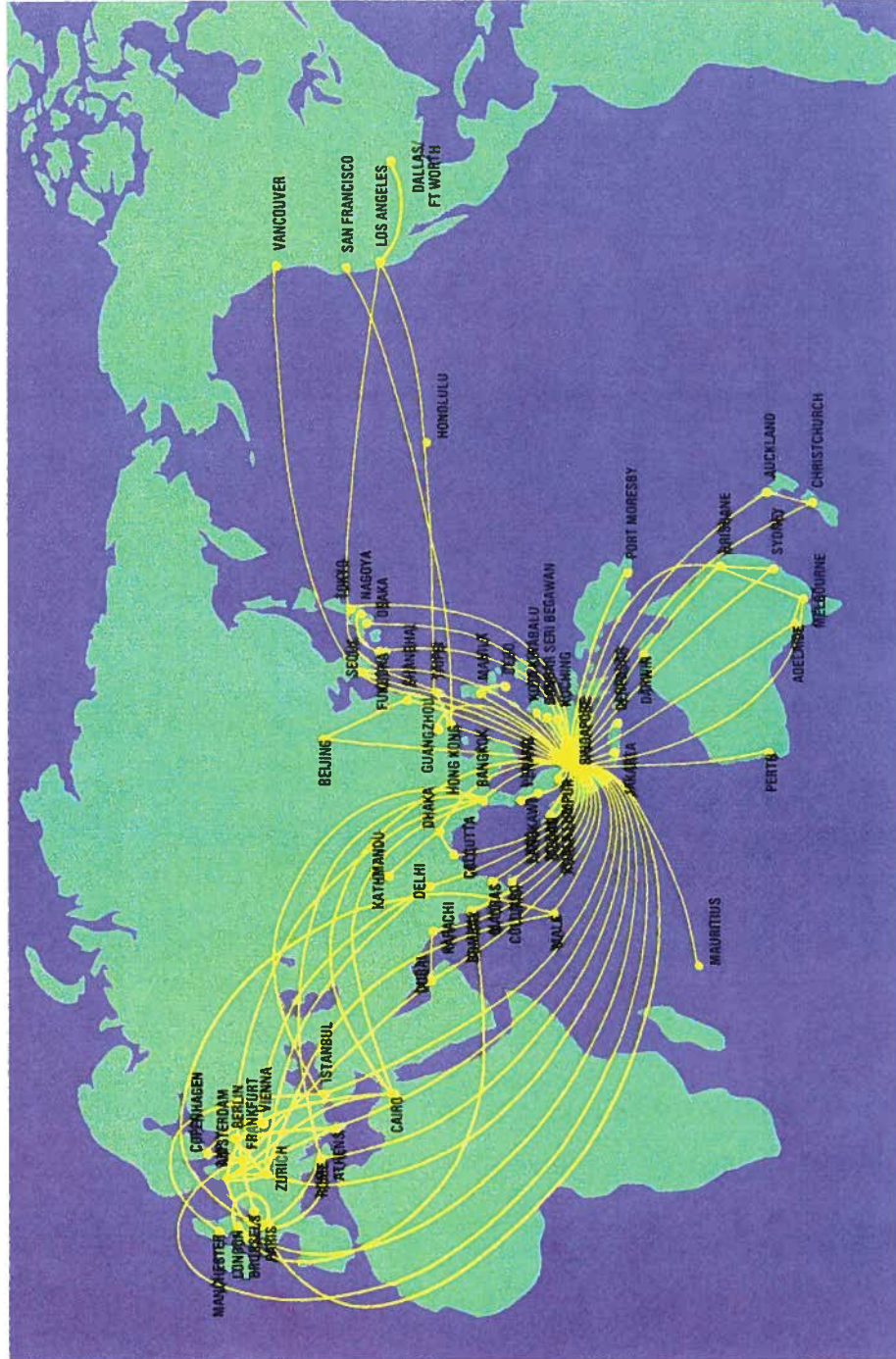


Figure 2-1: The promotion of Singapore as a Global Hub showing the many global connections of the city state. (Singapore 1991:58)

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Global Images**

The globalization of Singapore's economy is integrally tied to the role of women in society. The influx of multinational corporations and an increased demand for inexpensive labour altered women's role and their position in society. This chapter investigates the global processes that influenced the role of women in society during the modernization of Singapore. These processes were not the only influences, the local political, social and economic structures all impacted upon women and their roles.

Since the 1940s, women's role in Singapore society has evolved and expanded rapidly. Prior to the economic globalization of the 1960s, women's social roles were defined more by their ethnic backgrounds. They were influenced by the political activities for independence and women's rights in their country of ethnic origin (Wee 1987, 1993 PC). Between 1945 and 1959, women and women's rights became part of the political platform of the PAP (People's Action Party)<sup>8</sup>. From the landslide victory of 1959 to the split with Malaysia in 1965, the importance of women to the politicians declined. However, independence brought economic challenges in 1965 and an increased interest in women's role in the emerging economy. The concurrent global economic expansion seeking cheaper locations for assembly and production resulted in the integration of Singapore and women labourers into the global assembly line (Heyzer 1980, Elson and Pearson 1981).

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1959, voting was made compulsory and each voter was registered. In a bid to win the female vote the PAP adopted a pro-women platform similar to the 1949 China policy of total equality (Lim 1993, Turnbull 1989).

## **Globalization and Singapore**

The globalization of capital had a remarkable impact on Singapore. From the first period of expansion in the 19th Century<sup>9</sup> to the expansion in the 1960s, Singapore's position on the global stage has changed from a trading centre for the British East India Company to a global player in the production and information technology sectors. The unique geographic location of the island within the global complex has contributed to the economic growth of such a small nation (see Figure 2-1). The global expansion of industrial capital, in the 1960s, dramatically altered the former colony into what is called an "economic miracle", as one of the newly industrializing economies (NIEs) of Asia (Nolan 1990). This chapter explores the global forces that had the highest impact on Singapore, such as the foreign investment through multinational corporations (MNC), and the new role of female wage labour (Lim 1982, 1983; Wong 1983, 1986; Nolan 1990). The image of Singapore as the Global City is examined in the second section. The final section explores two avenues of global sociological change that followed the global economic changes: the change in consumer habits and the mass media. The global nature of these processes do not eliminate the local features of these processes present before the 1960's 'modernization' of Singapore rather they are used to emphasize the impact of global forces on Singapore women.

### **Processes of Change**

In the modernization of Singapore there are processes of change which are interconnected with the changing social landscape through which women negotiate their identities.

---

<sup>9</sup> In the economic expansion of the early 19th century, Singapore was exposed to the imports from India, China and Britain. In this way Singapore was integrated in the world economic system, however this was as an outpost of British business rather than as an independent player.

Industrialization, urbanization and social change are all part of this modernization as Singapore developed.

### Modernization

Modernization as a process has no common definition: to developmental theorists it may mean westernization, urbanization, industrialization or any combination of these aspects<sup>10</sup> (Chen 1980). Modernization has no definition that is accepted by all development theorists, although this has been the subject of discussion for decades. The modernization of a society according to Chen (1980) and used in this thesis, implies three conditions - “a social system that can constantly innovate without falling apart, differentiated, flexible social structures and a social framework to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for living in a technologically advanced world” (119). The modernization of the economy is defined as a shift to a more specialized division of production and labour, the adoption of technology and innovation in finance, services and manufacture, and a global interaction of goods and services. The modernization of the polity involves a changing of the political system ( the outcome of this change is usually more stability, although this is not necessary). The concept of modernization used in this discussion is separated into three spheres: society, economy and polity, with the recognition that there is substantial overlap and inter-relation. In the case of Singapore these processes of change interacted with each other; as the city state became more independent of the British politically, there were concurrent changes in the economy and the society.

---

<sup>10</sup> Peter Chen (1980) argues that industrialization, westernization and modernization are distinct and separate items. They can occur independent of each other, but Singapore experiences these concurrently. Chen (1977) distinguishes between these three processes by defining industrialization as technological change, modernization as a socio-political change, and westernization is the adoption of the Western lifestyle

### Industrialization

Singapore's economic development hinged on the adoption of the global economic system, the acceptance of technology, and economic rationality as the base upon which to build a modern city state. The creation of a 'modern' state and society was crucial to the global acceptance of Singapore as part of the world economic system in the 1960s.

“In the course of industrialization, Singapore has made every effort to introduce modern technology and to stimulate industrialization with the aim of achieving a high growth rate in the economy.”(Chen 1980:124)

The emphasis on economic change in Singapore in the 1960s, and the integration of Singapore in the global economic system by the government, led to many changes in the labour sector of the population. The labour unions of the 1950s were brought under control of the national government, along with the wages for these workers.<sup>11</sup> The factories being enticed to Singapore through incentives were mainly off-shore assembly operations.<sup>12</sup> These industries were looking for a literate, compliant labour force, and in Southeast Asia this was predominantly female (Wong 1975, Grossman 1979, Lim 1982). In the 1960s, the industrialization of Singapore was interconnected with the changing identity of women, as women were encouraged through government campaigns to take part in the development necessary for the economic survival of the newly independent nation, it became a national duty for women (similar to the men's military

---

<sup>11</sup> Beginning in 1959 the state set out to control the unions of Singapore with the creation of the Trade Union Amendment Bill, which gave the state the right to refuse registration of a union, this bill was not accepted but an Industrial Relations Ordinance was passed that effectively put the government within the bargaining process. In 1968 the government was able to pass bills that permitted the government to de-register any union it believed was pro-Communist. This effectively left the NTUC as the only union recognized by the state. By 1972 the state had created the National Wage Council that determined wages for workers. The PAP believed that the government had to control all instruments and centres of power for national development. (Chen 1983, Vasil 1989, Chua and Kuo 1991)

<sup>12</sup> The incentives were: 1) a stable, effective and honest government, 2) social and economic infrastructure, like roads and factories, 3) stable labour situation, 4) direct government involvement in financing, and 5) financial incentives: tax exemptions for up to ten years, 4% tax on exports instead of regular 40% on export profits, wages controlled by state, and labour controls (44 hour work weeks, retrenchment or retirement benefits after 3 years, reduced holiday and sick leave, and women's wages at 55% of men's. (Lim and Fong 1986)

service). Industrialization drew women who had never participated in wage labour before into the workforce. Employment in the MNCs contributed to the changes in the role of Singapore women and their perception of themselves by 1) state created public schools that increased the length of school available for women, 2) gave women more access to money for personal use, and 3) gave women access to the global products available through the MNC's factory store (Heyzer 1980, Grossman 1979). Industrialization of Singapore had a direct impact on women's lives and their exposure to images of femininity on the local and global levels.<sup>13</sup> In Singapore society:

“...the perception of women as feminine incorporates related notions about their patience, their manual dexterity, and such. These ‘virtues’ supposedly makes them particularly able to undertake tasks that are inherently repetitive and boring.”  
(Purushotam 1992:326)

As women's participation in the wage labour force increased over the past thirty years, these images of femininity have penetrated the social landscape of Singapore and these are explored further in Chapter 4.

### Urbanization

Urbanization as a process in the developing regions is the shifting of population, political power and economic activities from a predominantly rural base to a city base (see Armstrong and McGee 1985). In Singapore, this process was one of fine-tuning an already predominantly urban setting into a more current model of an urban area (Wong P. 1989). The push for modernization of the urban landscape by the Singapore government in the 1960s was to stimulate the local economy and to create a modern, stable environment for foreign investment. What rural areas

---

<sup>13</sup> Images of femininity from the MNCs were global, Western beauty - the blonde, blue eyed tall young woman, with lipstick and eye shadow. These images of beauty were transmitted through the factory stores which made cosmetics and fashions available at low prices or on credit. The local government also promoted the women as feminine to the MNCs: women were advertised as cheaper, having keen eyesight, nimble fingers and as docile (Heyzer 1986).

there were on the island in the 1960s were developed by the state into industrial parks or 'New Towns',<sup>14</sup> (Wong and Ling 1989).

The modernization of the physical landscape, from run down two story shop houses to clean high rise flats and from Chinese vegetable gardens and swamps to massive industrial parks (Wong and Ling 1989), reflected and reinforced the intense re-definition of the urban area. This was one of the largest public housing programmes and completely transformed Singapore's landscape.<sup>15</sup> The clean streets, the orderly treed areas, the intricate drainage system and the massive urban renewal created a controlled and healthy urban environment conducive to the government's modernization plan. These physical changes were imbedded with sociological changes, for example the shift from multi-family to nuclear family dwellings included: 1) the increased need for consumer items (Salaff and Wong 1984), 2) an increased independence of nuclear families, and 3) the full responsibility of the household duties by one woman (Quah 1990, Wong 1992). These social changes were part of the modernization process, where the combination of industrialization, urbanization and social change occurred in a period of twenty years (1965-1985).

#### Modernization and Social Change

Changes in the physical landscape and the economic structure create an opportunity for the social changes attached to modernization. These social changes include the introduction of new ideas from outside the country and the change in lifestyle which often accompany the

---

<sup>14</sup> Large areas of land were appropriated for the development of multi-storied public housing flats. One method used in the outlying areas was to create a new centre for hawkers and vendors, locate small commercial outlets and provide a transit centre in the 'New Towns'. In this way people could live, shop, and commute easily from their public flat.

<sup>15</sup> The Housing Development Board (HDB) was established in 1960. The public housing programme has continued for over thirty years and by 1990 it represented 72% of the housing stock occupied by 85% of the population. The majority of housing blocks are 15-20 stories high and there are often over 100 blocks in some of the newer developments. The density of housing blocks and lack of space on the island created a completely new physical landscape and altered the social landscape.



exposure to new behaviours (Parsons 1951, LeFebvre 1971, Inkeles 1983, Giddens 1988, James 1993). In Singapore, for example, the increase in scheduled work away from the home and the introduction of freeways and traffic lights produced the concept of commuting and compartmentalized the lives of the workers, work was done outside of the home, family time happened only outside of work and the remaining hours were spent in transit from one site to the other. One result of the adoption of new behaviours was the effect of these changes on the traditional value systems. In the case of Singapore the changes occurred very rapidly and this 'dislocated' the traditional system (Yong 1992). However, while the modernization of a society can cause some dislocation of values and cultural<sup>16</sup> traditions, they will not necessarily cause a displacement of culture:

"although the processes of industrialization and modernization affect one way or another the indigenous cultures, they do not necessarily cause the loss of cultures in these societies." (Chen 1980:122)

At times the 'modern' Western values were compatible with the traditional values. The extent of change to value systems depends on the unique context of each country.<sup>17</sup>

Industrialization and modernization in many developing countries meant Westernization to those who studied the development of the Third World. Westernization has come to mean a 'change' in value systems to some Singaporeans, and the desire to reject Western values for

---

<sup>16</sup> Culture: the whole fabric of society, the modes of living, customs and behaviors which form a set pattern of answers to important questions and establishes a framework for mutual reference and identity (Vente 1980). Chen summarizes these definitions: "culture refers to the total patterns of beliefs, customs, practices, institutions, techniques, and objects that the people of a society have inherited from their forefathers, have invented, or have adopted from other sources. Moreover culture is transmitted, learned, and shared." (1980:115-116)

<sup>17</sup> For example: Singapore and Malaysia gained independence at the same time but Malaysia has experienced an ethnic re-assertion during modernization where MNCs, religious leaders, and parents often cooperated in the control of women and their role in society. In Singapore there has been a decline in religious leaders and the education system has replaced some parental influence in women's behaviours. This reflects the different values present in each location: Malaysia is mainly Muslim and Singapore is comprised of a variety of religions, which are separate from the state.

'Asian' values can be connected with the rapid pace of change the city state experienced (Yong 1992). The coexistence of traditional objects with the modern objects of the global system, and the modification of both the traditional and modern objects to form the uniquely Singaporean society, shows that the process of modernization was not as linear as thought. The splitting of life, into the technocratic work period and the homelife into the cultural traditional period, is a very modern concept of life, but one that allows for continuity and for change.

Some of the traditional cultural values change to modern ones as industrialization emerges. The creation of new specialized institutions (factories, schools, hospitals, law courts) changed the roles of family members and their relations:

"It is not difficult to imagine what all these did to cultural patterns of Asian societies like the extended family, respect for elders, filial piety, authority. It was not that these values were emotionally or intellectually, discarded *per se*. Rather that that which people had to deal with, and that which they had to integrate into the fabrics of their life's, in short the challenges of the context they lived in, had changed tremendously demanding new responses different from those which were adequate before." (Vente 1980:90)

Industrialization could not take place without other changes: workers are needed in the factories on set schedules. This is a modern behavior that influences everyday life and alters the cultural base of a society. Developing countries "can borrow, imitate, or even 'steal' the technology from the West. They may accept technology from abroad, but they will use their indigenous solutions that are patterned in accordance with their own values, norms, and social systems." (Chen 1980:124). In this way the populace adapts to the new systems using their traditional social understandings as a base to work form.

The need to be more cognizant of the individuality of the experience of changes in countries (Schurmann 1993) I recognized in recent development theory. Steven Corbridge (1986) calls for more balanced approach to developing nations, and looks at the global dynamics

and national forces as equally important to the development of a country (local dynamics). The role of the local state, the global industries, and the regional tensions present in Southeast Asia must all be considered when viewing the social changes in Singapore. The Vietnam War and the United States policy of communist containment, placed Singapore in a special position for economic exposure and global integration.<sup>18</sup> The influences of globalization on the internal structures of the country and its citizens makes this a unique modernization and the use of the globalization by the local state are shown in Chapter 3. The geographical positioning and historical past, as noted in Chapter 1, contribute to the uniqueness of Singapore's global economic positioning. In this special environment, women are influenced by the changing physical, economic and social landscapes as they try to define and re-define their role in Singapore society.

#### New responses with industrialization

The social changes that accompanied the rapid industrialization required new responses from the population. Two areas which affected the social structure the most were the perceived decline in filial piety and decision making in the workplace. The elders have lost many of their functions as educators as specialized institutions take over (schools, armed forces, factories) the teaching process. This does not mean that the Asian value of filial piety is dropped but it is modified by the changing milieu. Professional qualifications are needed from the school system for the new employment opportunities which come with industrialization. Filial piety is still very much a part of Chinese cultural value systems and this plays a role in "maintaining the dignity of human beings in the modern world." (Chen 1980:130)

---

<sup>18</sup> This period between 1965 and 1970 saw the expansion of the Vietnam War at the same time Singapore was opening economically. In this was the US desire to curb communism through investment and Singapore's desire for investment coincided. The economic climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s is not likely to be repeated. (Nolan 1990)

The disintegration of the extended family system appears to develop in almost every modern society (Quah 1988, Quah *et al.* 1991), and in Singapore it was accelerated by the large scale public housing program (HDB). The role of the oldest generation was diminished because the family no longer resided together and the influences of one generation on the other declined. There were shifts connected with increasing individualism as more homes contained one or two generations (Chen 1980:128-9). There is also a larger volume of household responsibility by each member of the household, which can result in new tensions and stresses. The generation gap appears to be widening with modernization in Singapore as the education system replaced parents as the experts, and their role as educators diminished. With both parents often working away from home and the children's busy schedule of school and social activities, there is less time spent on family activities (Quah 1990a, 1990b, 1993; Lim 1993, PC).

Changes in the social structure of the workplace with industrialization caused many alterations including changes in how decisions were made and how employees advanced within the system. Decision making by consensus is not a 'true' mechanism in the industrial workplace. The hierarchical setup of most factories makes this method difficult. The cultural change that accompanies the change from consensus to objective decision making is that people look to authority for decisions based on their superior knowledge (which they must possess if they are in such a high position, due to their higher education status).

### The Global City and Imaginings

Singapore's position in the global economic system has already been noted in an earlier section, the image of Singapore as a Global City is investigated in this section. In a 1990 BBC production *The Intelligent Island* Singapore is portrayed as a strategic node in the information technology network. Government and business are given to projecting Singapore in the 21st

Century as an information society (“a society in which knowledge has replaced labour as the source of value” (Quah, S. and Quah J. 1989:110)). The image of a global identity for Singapore was embarked upon by the government in 1965 when the need for Singapore to cultivate global connections in case of regional political imbalance in Southeast Asia power relations (Second Indochina War and US containment policy). In 1960, the head of a UN Industrial Survey Mission suggested to Lee that the political requirements to economic growth for Singapore was first to get rid of the communists (didn’t matter how<sup>19</sup>) and secondly to let Raffles<sup>20</sup> stand, and accept heavy ties to the West for economic development (Chan 1993). As recently as 1989, P.M. Lee has connected the good government with the West:

“The ideal of good clean government is surely one of the most important legacies bequeathed to the Republic by the British. In Singapore today, this legacy is one of the strengths of its public life.” (Lee K. Y. cited by Lee, E. 1989:41)

Lee’s praise of the British government system in the recent book *Management of Success* is an example of the appearance of the acceptance of Western systems. At the same time the Singapore government has made various changes to the judicial system like removing the use of juries and appointing the judges (Williams 1990, Regnier 1991) as part of the local mechanisms of control discussed in Chapter 3.

Lee’s vision of Singapore, as more global than regional, was a strong strategic position for his political survival, insofar as he used his connections with Britain and the other industrialized nations to initiate trade discussions and economic integration. Singapore relied ,

---

<sup>19</sup> Getting rid of the communists was a preoccupation of the UN and United States in the 1960s, and the communist riots in Malaya after World War II had led the Mission to suspect that the communist were behind the move to independence by Singapore and Malaya.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles was the BEIC trader who founded the city for the trading firm in 1819, beginning 140 years of British connections, dependence in trade, military defense and finance. The desire for independence did not overrule the pragmatic thinking of Lee Kuan Yew, ties with Britain were needed for economic development in the early 1960s (Turnbull 1989).

and still relies, on integration with the international economy: “the PAP has championed internationalism ahead of economic nationalism” (Rodan 1993:79). In the early years, the PAP derived its political legitimacy from their ability to attract foreign capital (Rodan 1993).

The Singapore government used the Global City image to open up Singapore to the world (Ban 1992). The state has used the image of the Global City over the past 30 years changing the definition as needed in the local political rhetoric. In 1965, the Global City was used as a regional defensive positioning but by 1988 Singapore was the Global City that produced for international markets, was part of the global transportation & communication network, and was fully integrated with international finance. In the 1990s, Singapore’s image of the Global City is used to imply that the city-state has a world-wide competitiveness and receptivity (Ban 1992).

Investment in Singapore, as a sign of global capital, has increased: in 1973, 76% of investment was from foreign sources, by 1978 this stood at 94% and in 1987 had fallen to 83% (as a result of the global recession). In 1986 there were 7,500 foreign companies in Singapore, compared to the 1,720 in 1970. These companies represent one third of all active companies, they comprise 58% of employment and 87% of direct exports (Regnier 1991). The dependence of Singapore on the foreign dollars is countered by the state’s desire to curb the influence of foreign cultural and social values. While still dependent on foreign technology, capital, workers and expertise, the government is placed in a dilemma of wanting to stop the foreign cultural influences without stopping the other benefits (Wilkinson 1988).

For Singapore, being a Global City is a perceived economic necessity. The control of the population is linked to the need for global trade. Singapore (and Lee) are dependent on the interplay of the global/local roles: local controls are portrayed as needed for success in the global sphere, and the global role is needed for Singapore to survive (Regnier 1991). The equilibrium,

between local control and global economy, needs to be adjusted constantly by the government. The multiple layers of Singapore are oft times hidden by the apparently 'good clean government' and the 'orderly city'. The control of the political arena by the PAP since 1959 has been in part due to the economic success in the global sphere, but it is also due to the strong local controls on the populace by the state discussed further in Chapter 3.

### **Global Consumer Culture**

Singapore has been involved in the consumer culture since its founding as a British colony and the introduction of mass produced goods through the port city spread the desire for these secondary needs.<sup>21</sup> The modern consumer culture of the twentieth century was part of the wave of global influences in the developing countries. The spread of the ideology of consumerism, through the international mass media, increased along with the globalization of capital in the 1960s. Many of the products promoted were not essentials but were high prestige, non-essential items. For example, one of the most readily recognizable is *Coke*, whose image reflects the modern image of Westernized culture with a global appeal. *Coke* is more than a soft drink, it represents the lifestyle of those seen drinking the beverage in the advertisements (Sklair 1991). This is one example of the growth of new 'needs' that accompanied the industrialization of Singapore and that are part of the evolving global lifestyle of this modern urban city state.

### **Mass Media and Global culture**

The globalization of industry and labour was accompanied by the rapidly modernizing network of communications. The mass media, through television, movies, and magazines, played a large role in the images and ideals being transmitted throughout the globe. As a society

---

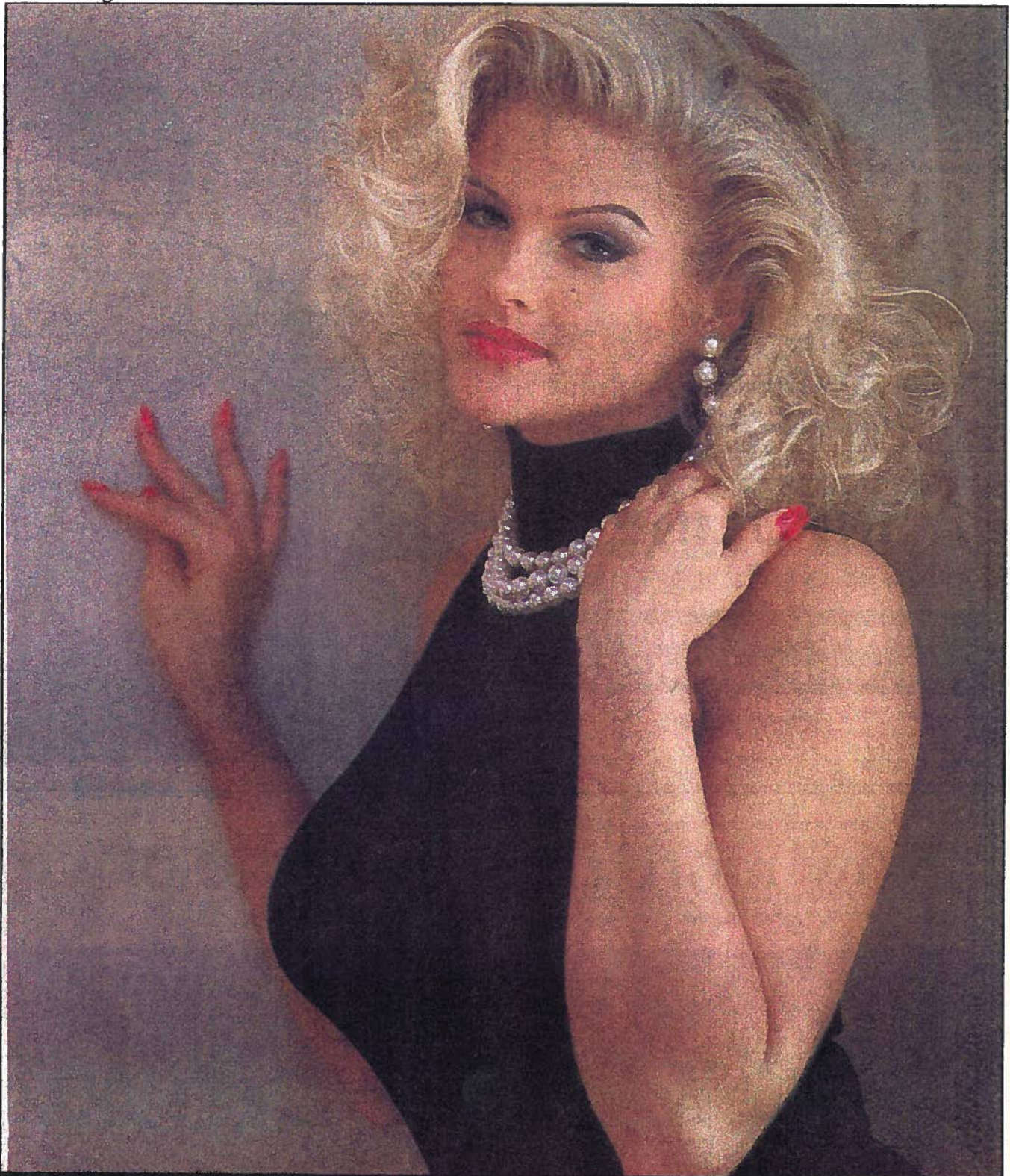
<sup>21</sup> Basic needs being food, shelter and clothing, with secondary needs there is a concern with quality of life rather than survival and these can include colour TV, luxury cars, or restaurant food.

becomes more integrated in the global economic system, changes in the communication network are accompanied by a change in consumer goods and their status. The collapse of time and space in the communications field exposed the majority of the globe to modern mass media. These mass communication networks project the consumer world of the industrialized nations and the images of the 'good life' are transmitted as part of the consumer good.

Commodities in the modern consumer society take on more cultural association and illusion with the increase in advertising. Advertising attaches images of romance, exotica, desire, beauty and fulfillment to even the most mundane objects, exploiting the consumers desire for the 'good life' (Featherstone 1991). The use of advertising in the media to promote products of consumption has spread rapidly, and these messages are embedded within a mythical socio-economic environment. The image of the modern 'Western' lifestyle is used to sell products, with a heavy emphasis on style and ornamentation rather than function (Mason 1981).

The integration of Singapore in the global economy and the global information network caused a spread of global images to the emerging consumers of Singapore. An increase in images of women from Europe and North America can be found in the increased number of magazines, the vast shopping centres and in the visual media. Singapore now boasts of having the 10th most expensive shopping street in the world (BBC 1990) and of having the 2nd largest DKNY (Donna Karan of New York, a top designer) boutique in the world. The celebration of the consumer culture was summed up in the 1993 opening of the Takashimaya shopping mall, where a near riot occurred when the 'Marilyn Monroesque' *Guess* Girl (see Figure 2-2, Anna Nicole Smith) opened the most recent denim store (*Straits Times* 16/08/1993:3).





### THE ESSENTIAL ANNA NICOLE SMITH GUIDE

- THE model (above) is unattached. "All the men I knew cheated on me."
- She loves men with braces. "It is a fetish."
- She loves cowboys. "But they are optional."
- She is looking for a man with a sense of humour, a sunny personality and who will be good to her son. "We are a package deal."
- She hates cocky people, unfaithful people and people who break promises.
- She hates make-up. "It feels like dirt on me."
- She does not get along with women. "I try my hardest, but they don't like me."
- She was embarrassed when she posed for Playboy. "I wouldn't open my legs or anything."
- She was skinny at 16. "I filled out after my son was born."
- She owns a 6-ha ranch near Houston and has 30 guinea fowl, three turkeys, three Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs, three horses, 20 cows, a breeding bull, two parrots, a squirrel, six dogs and two cars. "I'm looking for a couple of zebras and a chimp."

### Social Position and Consumer Culture

To understand the impact of consumer-based culture on the newly modernizing nation such as Singapore the complex images of consumer goods needs to be clarified. Exports of goods, from industrialized countries, make their mark on the day-to-day existence of modernizing nations. Luxury is being redefined and symbolized by these goods. The 'good life' is symbolic of a new social position in these nations - as a thoroughly 'modern' person (Ewen and Ewen 1992). The impact of the consumer culture on social and economic development in the modernizing nations needs to be viewed through the ideas surrounding the traditional/local, the modern/global and consumption. In the modern social system there is more emphasis on the merit of the individual and the goods, as part of a meaning producing system, are constantly being revised. New positions for persons in society are always evolving within this system (Mason 1981). Most societies are a combination of local and global influences, as modernity is a continually evolving process and Singapore is no exception as the society moves from a local basic needs consumption to a global-based consumption.

Consumer goods within the modernizing society are invested with cultural meaning and consumers use these goods for cultural purposes (McCracken 1988). These meanings are constantly changing and evolving within the cultural world of each society and the significance of consumer goods goes beyond their utilitarian nature and monetary value, it extends to their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning. Consumer goods can create new notions of gender, can be used for the preservation of certain ideals and can be an instrument of social continuity and change (McCracken 1988).<sup>22</sup> Consumer goods are acquired "not just for

---

<sup>22</sup> An example of the first instance is through the trickle down effect, where 'dressing for success' saw using certain goods to create a new image of women. In the second case, consumer goods can be used to preserve what are often called 'traditional' ideals, such as the clean house representing the good wife. In the final notion of cultural objectives of consumer goods, as a



themselves but for what they symbolize, for their associations, for their contribution to a particular image” (Burke 1993:149) of self in society. Goods are integrated in the culture and structure of the modernizing society as signifiers of status, position and class.

### Singapore and Consumer Culture

The major contributors to the economic growth of Singapore, over the past twenty-five years, were the multinational corporations (investments from foreign firms in manufacturing are four times the local commitment in 1992 (Dept. of Statistics 1993)). Singapore sought out Western firms that were looking for cheap labour and conducive climates for business. These MNCs brought experts and lifestyles, along with their new factories and they encouraged the purchase of global goods through in-factory shopping (such as cosmetics, fashions, foods and electronics) (Grossman 1979). The appeal of the ‘Western’ lifestyle was reinforced by the mass media (the introduction of Western television shows, Western glamour magazines and Western advertisements). The image of being part of the global economic community was purchased by the local population through the products of the industrialized nations, from lipsticks to MacDonald’s.

In the 30 years since independence, there has been a corresponding increase in the spending of the population as they saw real increase in wages and the quality of life became an issue. Real wages grew by an average of over 4% between 1972 and 1984 (Lim 1989). This growth in wages was accompanied by a low rate of inflation, averaging 3.1% between 1965 and 1973, and averaging 4.4% between 1973 and 1984. Between 1965 and 1984, the average annual growth rate in the gross national product (GNP) was 7.8%. These favorable factors for a

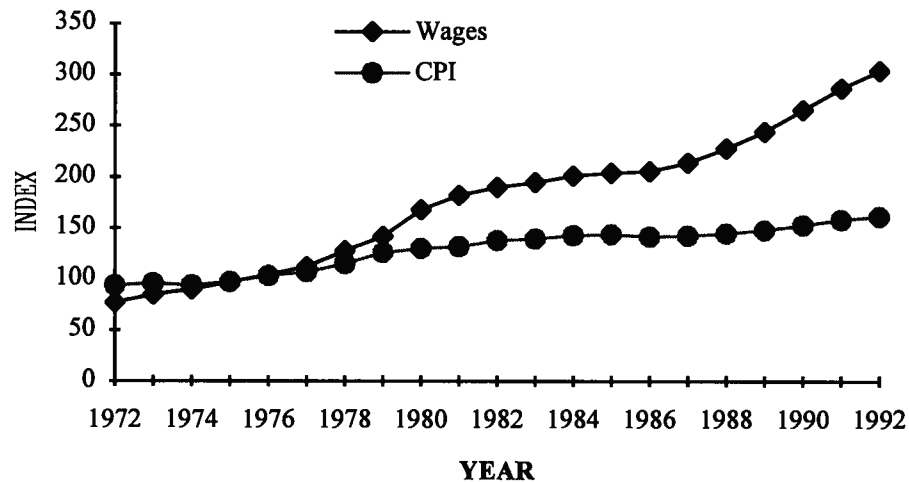
---

instigator of change, for example: the rapid growth of the electronics products in countries where new factories are producing such items, even if these products are technologically and monetarily beyond the majority of workers in the factories there is an increased perceived need to possess these items (McCracken 1988).

consumer economy provided the citizens of Singapore with more income which could be directed at their standard of living rather than just survival. The increase in wages has exceeded the increase in the consumer price index (CPI) since 1976 (see Figure 2-3).

**Figure 2-3**

**Consumer Price Index and Wage Index, May  
1978=100**



Source: Yearbook of Statistics Singapore 1992, FEER

While 60% of households still have incomes below \$1,000 per month, none the less, as Table 1 shows there has been a substantial increase in wages. Between 1980 and 1990, after accounting for the rise in the consumer price index, Singaporeans' experienced a doubling of wage income (see Table 2-1). In 1980, the average household income was \$1,228 and in 1990 it was \$3,076 (Dept. of Statistics 1991). The buying power of most households increased dramatically during this ten year period, even with a depressed economy for 1985 and 1986.

**Table 2-1**  
**Average Annual Household Income, 1977/78, 1982/83 and 1987/88**

Amount (US \$ per year, 1983\$'s)	1977-78 (%)	1982-83 (%)	1987-88 (%)
Below \$2,999	21.5	4.8	3.8
\$3,000-\$5,999	40.4	26.3	20.8
\$6,000-\$8,399	19.0	21.6	21.4
\$8,400-\$11,999	9.0	14.8	16.0
\$12,000-\$17,999	6.3	15.7	17.3
\$18,000-\$23,999	2.2	7.0	8.7
\$24,000-\$29,999	0.8	3.8	4.8
Above \$30,000	0.8	6.0	7.2
<b>Average Annual Household Income</b>	<b>\$6,396</b>	<b>\$12,174</b>	<b>\$13,278</b>

Source: Singapore government household surveys, 1978/78, 1982/83, and 1987/88.  
 Dept. of Statistics, 1980, 1985, 1990 in Report on the Household Expenditure Survey

The typical Singaporean household is now consumer based; it consists of a nuclear family home (85%, Dept. of Statistics 1991) with access to the following goods within the home: the refrigerator (98%), television (98%) and telephone (100%) (Dept. of Statistics 1990, FEER 1994). The increasing range of goods available was due to the increased production of foreign goods in Singapore. It was also a response to the increased ability of the Singapore consumer to demand better and more diverse goods, due to 'real wage' increases and multiple wage earning households.

The average number of working persons in a household, according to the 1990 census data, was 2.0 persons (Lau 1992b). The proportion of single-income households declined from 39 percent to 36 percent and the percentage of two income households increased from 27 to 36 between 1980 and 1990 (Lau 1992b). The decline in household size and the increase in two income households lead to a higher demand for modern conveniences within the family home. This demand for more consumer durables can be seen in Table 2-2, where high proportions of households had refrigerators by 1988 and VCRs had increased from 27.7% of households in

1982/83 to 71% in 1988. The ability of the Singapore households to purchase these modern conveniences is one indicator that they actively participate in the global consumer culture.

**Table 2-2**  
**Households with specific Consumer Durables**

Consumer Durable	1982/83	1987/88
Refrigerator	96.1	98.3
Television	95.2	97.9
Video Cassette Recorder	27.7	71.0
Piano/Organ	9.8	11.4
Personal Computer	*	11.2
Air conditioner	11.2	19.4
Washing Machine	46.8	73.5
Car	25.5	29.8
Motor-cycle/Scooter	16.0	13.5

Source: Dept. of Statistics (1990) *Report on the Household Expenditure Survey 1987/88*. Singapore: National Printers

The Singapore consumers, safe in the knowledge that their savings are protected and their 'basic needs' are taken care of, spend the remainder of their salaries. The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is one reason why Singaporeans are good savers and good spenders. The CPF was set up in 1955 as a retirement fund for workers. Over the years this fund has expanded to include home purchases, medical costs, parents medical costs, retirement and some education costs. These expansions coincided with a decrease in state supplied services. The use of the CPF to pay for housing is perhaps one of the most important aspects of this plan as: the mortgage payment is "not even part of the conscious budgeting" (Chua 1989:1012) of the household. With the compulsory deduction of almost 20 percent of income to the fund, matched by the employer, the average annual savings is 40 percent of the gross wage of every worker (Dept. of Statistics 1993). While these savings cover the costs of pension, medical, and, most importantly, housing; the household is free to spend the remainder on food, clothing, and other day to day items.

### Women, Wages and CPF

In addition to the wages earned by women, their employment garners additional benefits for the household. Women, and their employment, contribute to the housing opportunities of the family by increasing the CPF pool for the household. In addition to these enforced savings, employees receive a thirteenth month bonus that women have been known to use for the purchase of large consumer items (like microwaves or televisions)(Salaff and Wong 1984). Women's earnings are no longer considered 'supplementary' by most Singaporean families who wish to improve their standards of living and in many cases women's employment is needed for working and middle class families to maintain their social position (Low *et al.* 1993, Quah 1993, Wong 1981).

### The Consumer Household

The range of households in Singapore is shown in Table 2-3 from the *Household Expenditure Survey of 1987/88* (Dept. of Statistics 1990). The type of housing and the average income of each household is shown in Table 2-3, 89% of the sample resided in HDB flats and had a median monthly income of \$1,515. The sample has a average income of \$2,213, which is far under the reported average income of \$3,076 in the 1990 Census on Households (Lau 1992b). Although this sample survey has similar distribution to the full household composition, the incomes do not appear to represent the average household. One explanation for the differences in average and median incomes could be that there is a widening income gap, where the top 20 percent are skewing the averages.

**Table 2-3**  
**Household Income, by Housing type, Quartiles 1987/88**

Type of House	Median Income	Average Household Income	Number of Households in Sample	Percent of Sample
Bungalow & Terrace Houses	4,744	5,980	308	5
Public Flats	1,515	1,881	5,111	89
Private Flats	4,765	5,374	169	3
Others*	1,642	2,234	154	3
Total	1,599	2,213	5,742	100%

\*Others includes shophouses and atap homes

Source: Dept. of Statistics (1990) *Report on the Household Expenditure Survey 1987/88*  
Singapore: National Printers

The range of median incomes in Table 2-3 shows the diverse living styles of Singaporeans, from the public flats to the private flats there is a \$3,250 difference in household income. How income was spend by these households can be seen through Table 2-4 where the consumer durables and housing type are compared. The demand for consumer goods was not limited to basics but includes many extras (see Table 2-4).

**Table 2-4**  
**Consumer Durables, Percentage owned by Housing Type, 1987/88**

Consumer Durable	Years of Surveys		Type of House, 1987/88 Survey			
	1982/83	1987/88	Bungalow & Terraces	Public Flats	Private Flats	Others **
Refrigerator	96.1	98.3	99.7	98.6	98.8	87.0
Television	95.2	97.9	98.7	98.0	99.4	89.6
Video Cassette Recorder	27.7	71.0	82.1	70.5	79.9	55.8
Piano/Organ	9.8	11.4	42.9	8.8	36.1	6.5
Personal Computer	*	11.2	34.1	9.5	24.9	9.7
Air conditioner	11.2	19.4	70.5	14.4	82.2	14.9
Washing Machine	46.8	73.5	86.7	72.9	87.0	53.9
Car	25.5	29.8	79.5	24.9	75.7	44.2
Motor-cycle/Scooter	16.0	13.5	3.0	14.1	5.9	20.1

\*not listed as a category in 1982/83    \*\*Others includes shophouses and atap homes

Source: Dept. of Statistics (1990) *Report on the Household Expenditure Survey 1987/1988*  
Singapore: National Printers



The economic prosperity and the growing cult of materialism began in the 1970s. By the 1990s the wealthy and middle classes were buying luxury homes, cars, jewelry, and 'brand' named products associated with social status (fashion and cosmetics are part of the day to day evaluators of status). People were judging and being judged on a material rather than moral basis and the status of a profession was related to its social and financial standings (Ho 1989). The group which was singled out as being the most influenced by this increased consumption were the youth of Singapore.

#### The New Affluence of Youth

The youth of Singapore refers to the groups of persons between 15 and 40 years of age. This group is also the majority of the population due to the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s. These people are the vocal majority when it comes to social change and they are the groups towards whom the majority of social change is directed (Wilkinson 1988, Rodan 1993). Women, in their traditional role as mothers, are reminded that the family is where values are taught and thus they are responsible for the values of the next generation as Singapore modernizes (Lim 1993).

“Undesirable Western Ideas such as individualism, materialism, utilitarianism and decadence have spread to Singapore in the course of modernization. Singapore youths have been under such bad influence from movies, television programmes, radio programmes, newspapers, magazines and novels imported from the West” (Lim 1992:218)

The younger generation of Singaporeans (those under 40 years) are often portrayed as materialistic in the media. In a *Straits Times* article entitled Buy, Buy Kids the young people were described as hedonistic, materialistic, and individualistic (*Straits Times* 29/07/1991:2). In other cases the young people are accused of discarding:

“traditional oriental values of thrift and savings through postponing present consumption in anticipation of future gains ... in favour of consumerism and hedonism” (Ho 1989:679)

The increased leisure time and access to money by the youth of Singapore has been lamented by many officials of the government. The “Centrepont Kids” and “MacDonald’s Kids” in the mid-1980s were the focus of a campaign to get the young people to change their behaviours from what was perceived as Western to an Asian behaviour (Wilkinson 1988, Roschad and Mahizhnan 1990). The behaviour of the youth was thought to be a reflection on the changing family and value systems (Chua 1989, Siddique 1989), the P.M. Lee commented:

“Our primary concern is to ensure that , whilst all our women become equal to men in education and promotions, the family framework in bringing up the next generation does not suffer as a result of high divorce rates, or equally damaging, neglect of the children with both parents working.” (Lee cited in Wee 1987:9)

The youth of Singapore was the focus of a marketing survey in 1991 to understand the thoughts and feelings of contemporary Singaporeans aged 15-40 (Kau and Yang 1991). The reason for the focus on this age group was that they had grown up in the period since independence and known only economic prosperity. While this report was from a marketing perspective, the insight into the values and lifestyles shows the influence of consumption and the media in Singapore. For example: the top three magazines in the survey were: 1) Readers Digest (English edition), 2) the TV Times, and 3) Her World and Female (both local women’s magazines). When questioned about women’s role, 52% believed that a women’s role was fulfilled only if she could provide a happy home for her family. These young people appear on one hand to be modern but some of their values reflect the state’s rhetoric.

The youth are subject to the high costs of living in Singapore, when they begin work at the lower starting salaries they are unable to purchase a HDB flat or a car. It now cost \$30,000 to purchase a certificate which permits the holder to purchase a car and run it for ten years. The owner then must pay a high rate for the cars as they are subject to import tariffs of 150% (to

control supply) paying \$40,000 for a car. In addition, if the owner wishes to use the car to enter the central area during the workday, they must purchase a special permit monthly. All in all owning a car is outside the budgets of most working class Singaporeans. (PC). The government did not permit single persons to purchase a HDB flat until the end of 1991, when the restrictions were relaxed and single persons over 35 years of age could purchase a flat for personal use (they are past marrying age see Chapter 4). The high cost of private flats, running 3 to 4 times a HDB is far out of the financial feasibility of most young people. These young people usually remain at home until marriage, paying room and board to their parents. The remainder of their salaries are spent on personal items such as cosmetics. Cosmetics are but a small part of most women's disposable income when compared to the high cost of owning a private flat or an automobile. They are an inexpensive way to display perceived social positioning and identity. The wide variety of cosmetics and the wide range of prices make them an available representation of the global consumer culture imprinted upon women's faces.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at various aspects of modernization, to see the evolution of Singapore as it emerged on the global economic stage in the twentieth century. By looking at the processes often associated with modernization, I was able to show the effects of integration in the world system with women and their role in society. The image of a Global City was discussed in the second section as the Singapore government utilized the global image for instituting local controls. The other two sections of this chapter investigated the global processes involved in the modernization of Singapore, the mass media and consumer culture. Women were interconnected with the government's plan for industrialization through their marketability in the global investment sphere. The image of the Global City made the participation in the labour force a

national duty for women, as the economic survival of the nation was at stake (see Chapter 4). The integration of women in the consumer culture and the display of ideal images through the mass media portrayed women in the global beauty sphere created a demand for the consumer goods which would aid women in their participation in the globalization and modernization of Singapore.

Contrary to the global vision of Singapore, there is another side to the local/global dialectic which needs investigation. The image of Singapore as a completely integrated and modern information centre is countered by the many restrictions on the society. The local controls are, according to the government, needed for Singapore to participate in the global economic system and are explored in the next chapter.

.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Local Images**

#### **Local Images**

This chapter moves from the global images of Chapter 2 to the local images of Singapore. In contrast to the integration in the global economic system, the Singapore government has tried to restrict the access to the global social and political changes that accompany the economic exposure. Through the use of restrictive legislation, public behaviour campaigns and the removal of political opposition (through detention or co-option) the state is able to enforce an internal vision of Singapore society.

Women are integrated into the global economy as part of the 'economic survival' for Singapore. By contrast women in the local sphere are pressed to maintain the family and Asian values as part of state's desire to retain control over the populace. The changing control mechanisms used by the government are explored in this chapter against the Singapore political backdrop. Women featured in the political rhetoric in the 1950s and early 1960s but there has been a steady decline in the rhetoric around the 'liberation' of women since (Wee 1987). The 1980s brought another swing in the political interest in the role of women as the government faced losses in the political popular vote, a tightening labour situation and more demands for individual choice. Women's position in this global/local dialectic are explored further in Chapter 4, where the direct impacts of local control on women is discussed. This chapter focuses on the local control mechanisms which affect the population as a whole.

The first section of this chapter looks at the political background and the most dominant political rhetoric: 'the politics of survival.' The second section looks at the social mechanisms which have been utilized by the state to control the behaviours of the citizens, men and women alike. The final section explores the recent responses to the local controls and how women are directly affected by the continuing local controls.

### Local Controls

In contrast to the global images of Singapore, the local images of the city-state are exercises in control. The government effectively controls the wages, unionism, state enterprises and public monopolies ( such as Singapore Airlines, DBS Banks, POS postal service & Singapore Telecom, with some privatization in the 1990s). The government holds 75% of all the land, releasing just enough to keep control of the prices and maintain a healthy construction sector. The government also dictates the contribution levels into the CPF, to control inflation and to increase funds for HDB housing construction (Rigg 1991). In addition to the economic controls, the government has used its strong political position to create an orderly society, where the people are responsible to the government instead of the government responsible to the people (Leifer 1990). The external challenges to Singapore (regional ethnic tensions, global economic crises, social decay) have been used to justify and to legitimate most of the local control measures introduced by the PAP since 1959 (Regnier 1991).

### Political Background

In Singapore the divisions between the PAP political party, the government bureaucracy and the state are blurred. The PAP influences all exercises of state power in this small nation state (Rodan 1993). The blending of the party with the state was a result of the removal of any possible opposition by the PAP in the early years of independence. Although brought to power

by a heavy left wing ideology the more conservative elements of the PAP came to power by using the British and the communist threat to remove the more militant elements. The result was a one party rule of the independent colony and of Singapore since inception in 1965. The National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) is the pro-PAP led trade-union movement, that is heavily integrated with the government. The NTUC effectively gives the state control of the labour movement in Singapore, one of the essentials to attract foreign capital according to the government. The PAP were also able to co-opt the civil service, by offering job security and high wages, so that the blending of the administration and the bureaucracy went smoothly (Rodan 1993). By 1965 the PAP/government had established “multiple networks of para-statal grassroots institutions” (Chan 1993). These included the many layered consultative committees connected with the electoral and housing districts.

Increased exposure to global knowledge has been countered by the state with more repression and authoritarianism, which Rodan (1993) associates with the desire to maintain the one party rule. It is often thought that with growing affluence and middle class lifestyle there is a relaxing of political structures in developing countries (Williams 1992). Singapore, however, has experienced an increase in controls in the 1980s. The causes of this increase are speculated about by many who have written on Singapore (Clammer 1985; Rodan 1989, 1993; Williams 1992, Singh 1992, Chan 1993). One theme which has gathered support is that political desires to maintain one party control of the city state are the basis for the increased repression (Rigg 1991, Regnier 1991, Singh 1992, Rodan 1993). The reason this idea has gained in acceptance is that increased repression has coincided with the fall of political support of the PAP in the election polls (Wilkinson 1988, Singh 1992, Rodan 1993) (see Table 3-1). The major drop in popularity

was between the 1980 and 1984 general elections, but the drop has continued albeit at lesser rates.

**Table 3-1**  
**Percentage of Popular Vote, Various Singapore Elections**

<b>Election Years</b>	<b>Percentage of Popular Vote</b>
<b>1980 General Election</b>	75.50%
<b>1984 General Election</b>	62.94%
<b>1988 General Election</b>	61.76%
<b>1991 General Election</b>	59.00%
<b>1993 Presidential Election</b>	59.% <sup>23</sup>

Source: Singh 1992, *Asia Yearbook 1994* pp. 201-202.

The fall in political popularity was not caused by any one factor; “rather, an interplay of elements accounted for the growth of divergence in Singapore between the PAP and the electorate” (Singh 1992:173). One factor may be the indirect result of the successes of the PAP: the basic needs of the populace had been met and now they wanted more political freedoms (Singh 1992).

The government operates inside the constitution and the law, but with the total one party rule and only one or two opposition members since 1965, the government/PAP are able to change the law and constitution at will. The government is less political than it is administrative. There is no coherent political ideology behind the current PAP dominated state,<sup>24</sup> economic

---

<sup>23</sup> The PAP endorsed candidate received 59% of the votes. No candidates were found who ‘passed’ the governments requirements, so the government solicited an opposition candidate (who even endorsed his rival). The 41% garnered by this reluctant presidential candidate has been viewed by some foreign press as an expression of dissatisfaction with the method of presidential election.

<sup>24</sup> The PAP began with the support of the leftist labour union, but the moderate socialist have become firmly entrenched in the PAP and the ‘free market’ capitalism has become a focus as the party moves to a combination of socialist and capitalist features.



success appears to be the main goal. The government is aligned with business with the unions tamed and co-opted (Milne and Mauzy 1990).

In Singapore, the government is paternalistic (BBC 1990). Head Minister Lee believes that he knows what is best for Singaporeans, and he has been described as the stern Confucian father (Sandhu and Wheatley 1989, Milne and Mauzy 1990). The combined ideology of Confucian elitism (all are not born equally) and the meritocracy (those at the top deserve more because they are the most ‘talented’) preserves the status quo of the PAP and the Singapore society. An excerpt from a book published by the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore for school teachers shows that ideology preferred in the schools:

“Fundamentally speaking, all human beings should have equal rights and duties. However, since society involves so much specialization of work and division of labour, in fact everyone has his own assigned duties relating to his position in society.

Rights and duties therefore have to be properly defined for the people so that they know how to do their part to build a rational, fair and moral society.” (Tu 1984:82-83)

The hierarchical society defends and defines itself through such rhetoric of proper places for each person. The ruling elites have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo of society, and they fear a loss of position with growing individualism of younger generations (Kuah 1990). In the 1960s, the populace accepted that those at the top knew more than they and bowed to their expertise. The top-down approach of government was reminiscent of the colonial government’s style, as if the PAP had stepped into the shoes of the leaving colonial government. The government does not trust the people to make decisions for themselves and the state believes that they would be better able to run the country if they didn’t have to deal with elections. Elections were held “despite reservations about the ability of the voting public to understand the issues fully” (Milne and Mauzy 1990:106). The sharp drop in popular vote in 1984, caused some

concern to Lee and in “One of his initial responses, prompted by canvassing on racial grounds, was to raise the prospect of re-examining the one person, one-vote system” (Leifer 1990:28) Lee has suggested “that it may be necessary ‘to try and put some safeguards into the way in which people use their votes’” (Lee in Vogel 1989:1051).

“The politics of maintenance betrays a lack of confidence in the people of Singapore, who are thought not to have attained sufficient political maturity to appreciate just how vulnerable their material inheritance is.” (Leifer 1990:27)

In Lee’s first cabinet, he expressed the need to form a cabinet that was made up of Singapore’s best and that decision making would be from the top down (Tillman 1989, Leifer 1990, Rodan 1993). The best in this case consisted of Lee and his fellow England-educated colleagues, who felt that they were just such a group capable of implementing this method of rule (Chan 1989). The first order of business was political stability, which was promoted as a pre-requisite for industrialization and modernization. They believed that society needed to be organized and imbued with certain values to respond to the government’s desired directions (the goal was to create their image of a ‘modern’ citizen) (Milne and Mauzy 1990).

### **Politics of Survival**

The theme of ‘struggling for survival’ has been the cornerstone concept of nation building in Singapore since 1965 (Rodan 1993). The government has used external events to maintain an atmosphere of insecurity - the duality’s of us/them, David/Goliath and Singapore/the world - to retain the loyalty of the citizens to the government who protects Singapore first and foremost (Regnier 1991). Lee feels that Singapore could not survive without the PAP. The PAP has succeeded in reconciling Singapore’s domestic social order and its external vulnerability by subordinating the first to the second (Regnier 1991). Goh Chok Tang’s National Day speech in 1990 pictured Singapore as always vulnerable and unique - small with no resources and many

races and religions. (Saw 1990). In a recent book on political change in the Asia-Pacific, Professor Chan Heng Chee's paper was titled "Singapore Coping with Vulnerability" (1993), which suggests that the rhetoric of the politics of survival is still in use in Singapore. The stress on the continued vulnerability of the city-state implies that without the current government, and the talented people who run it, there would be no economic miracle. The politics of survival are a rationalized ideology of the precarious city state, with sensitive ethnic and geo-political contexts and an urgent task of economic development. The civil society was a casualty in this process of 'surviving' (Rodan 1993). The political curbs are positioned as a trade off for material benefits, the PAP political objectives were economic imperatives. "Economic survival regulates all domestic activities" (Regnier 1991:230).

The extrapolation of Singapore's social downfall generates a fear of loss of life style, and in this way the survivalist rhetoric maintains the cooperation of those who benefit from the PAP's 'economic miracle' (Wilkinson 1988, Reiger 1989, Williams 1992, Rodan 1993). For example when discussing the access to the information highway by the general population, the government employs the survivalist rhetoric:

"freedom of expression and of access to information may clash with the government's need to prevent conflicts of ideas from developing into ethnic, religious, or other conflicts, thereby sparking off conflagrations and, ultimately, uncontrollable violence and the self-destruction of the society." (Reiger 1989:1030)

Part of the government's politics of survival was the introduction of the moral education classes and a stress on the family as the basic component of society. These are two ways in which the government is said to 'combating' the decadence of Western values which are 'invading' Singapore. Lee is worried about the lapse of 'traditional values':

“Contamination of insidious television programs where this supremacy of individual wishes overrides everything else is subconsciously being fed into young minds and undermining traditional values.” (Lee 1992 in *Pacific Century Video 7*)

Lee (1992), Ho (1989) and Ling (1989) have all used the term “combating” when referring to the Western value system and the Asian value system. The reduction of this social change to a warlike situation is not new to Singapore. The survivalist attitudes of the government has been used in many different situations, the ‘us and them’ behaviour between the non-Muslim Singapore and the large Muslim world surrounding it, the possibility of invasion if Singapore is not ‘careful’. The vulnerability of Singapore and the need for a strong government to protect the island, and its new affluent lifestyle, is a common theme (Regnier 1991). Peter Chen uses a technique similar to Lee :

“Singapore is evidently in the transition period ... if individual demands, accelerated by modern values, are not held in check by individual and collective responsibility, and if modern Western values and norms are unconditionally adopted by the population, there is a danger of shifting to the Type III (stagnant and declining) instead of the Type I (highly developed), pattern of development.” (1980:121)

By calling upon the governments rhetoric of survivalist ideology, Chen issues a warning of the adoption of ‘Western values’ and the need for control is implied. Lee insists that social control, through programs like moral education and population regulation, are required due to the “ethnic strife” in Singapore (Lee 1992 in *Pacific Century Video 7*).

As a small, young nation Singapore has used the survivalist rhetoric for over twenty years, but there are signs that the citizenry are changing their views. With the aging of the original cabinet and Lee’s elite group of talented men, who will take over? The grooming of Lee’s son, Brigadier General (retired) Lee Hsien Loong, for a role as prime minister (elected head of government) and the creation of the elected presidency (a previously ceremonial

position) are two ways in which Lee is sure to exert control on the destiny of Singapore (Leifer 1990). The preparation of Lee Hsien Loong can be seen from his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister and Goh's confirmation in November 1993 of Loong as his successor. The elected presidency was first suggested by Lee in 1985, just after the losses of 1984 election. The necessary constitutional amendments were done by 1991 and the position has the power of veto on financial and constitutional bills (FEER 1994). The new role for the president is to prevent, in the unlikely occurrence that an opposition party came to power, the abuse of finances by the government through a presidential veto. The president's role is then to safeguard the current government's interest in the event that they lose control of the parliament.

The change from the old guard to the second generation of leaders has included reforms to the political public image. The new guard and their consultative government image is an answer to the change in election popularity. Many of the new guard are drawn from the military, who are also university educated abroad (Milne and Mauzy 1990, Balakrishnan 1990b, Singh 1992, Rodan 1993). The new generation consists of more technocrats and administrators than politicians, and their ability to run for office in the changing social atmosphere of Singapore has been questioned by Lee (Rodan 1993, Leifer 1990).

In the late 1980s there were reforms<sup>25</sup> as the government shifted to the second generation. While these reforms decreased the paternalism, their goal was to preserve and protect the one party state. Most of the reforms involved co-opting opposition groups and

---

<sup>25</sup> Beginning in 1984 there were changes to the running of the country's political system. The first reform was the creation of an opposition by the government, NCMP (non-constituent members of parliament) these were the three highest opposition losers from the election, who would sit in parliament with no voting on constitutional or financial matters. In 1985 the Feedback unit was established for dialogue sessions with persons or groups who wish to affect government policy. In 1986 new Town Councils were set up that were run by the elected MP, Lee warned those who had elected an opposition MP could receive bad services but this has not proved true (Rodan 1993). The most recent reform was the creation of NMP (nominated members of parliament) (more in text). The purpose of the reforms were to direct opposition and dissent through state institutions and in this way co-opt opposition. (Singh 1992, Rodan 1993)

disgruntled elements thus pre-empting reform demands that would threaten PAP rule (Rodan 1993). Even with these reforms, the government still focuses on the legitimization of the 'vulnerable' city state to support the current social order (Rodan 1989, 1993). Tangled up in the national ideology is the desire for governance through consensus not contention - this policy is part of the new package being created around the PAP as a consultative government. In this way the opposition is brought into the government where they are privileged and the government is able to observe them, this does not mean that they have any real power in parliament or are able to change policy but it does appear that the government is more willing to listen to criticism - as long as it is behind closed doors (Rodan 1993).

One example of the implementation of this policy of consensus and co-option is the appointment of Dr. K. Soin to parliament as an NMP. "Kanwaljit Soin was named Woman of the Year on Friday, six months after entering Parliament as a Nominated MP. These achievements once seemed like impossible dreams for Aware, the outspoken women's group she leads." (Singam 1993). This woman is eminently qualified to be a NMP, an orthopedic surgeon, president of Aware and one of its founding members. Aware has purposely chosen to take a non-confrontational stance with the state (PCs). Aware members have written letters to the editor regarding different issues affecting women and has conducted public forums. One important factor in the recognition of Aware, is that this organization has not "been involved in the development of grassroots linkages in a way that would threaten the PAP's control over the political process. Such factors temper the PAP's otherwise skeptical attitude to NGOs" (Rodan 1993:93). The nomination of the president of one of the most outspoken women's groups to the parliament reflects the new 'consultative' approach of the state. By being part of the state apparatus, will K. Soin be able to maintain her strong positions on women's rights in Singapore?

The response by the population to these reforms of the second generation of politicians will be shown in the next general election.

#### Local Controls and Size

The ability of the Singapore state to create, implement and maintain social controls is related to the size of the nation. The main island measures only 42 km. by 23 km., and this permits easy transfer of ideas and policy. Due to the small size of the island and the small population, those who 'rock the boat' are easily found and isolated by various means (Wilkinson 1988). Smallness is an advantage in the implementation of state policies. There is little communication problem, the state is able to get out its messages, by word of mouth or through the media, and this "serves to enhance political control by the leadership" (Quah, J. 1987:78). The small size of Singapore improves the coordination and responsiveness of the bureaucracy - the government is able to see when policy is being implemented (Quah, J. 1987). The smallness of the island is valuable for use in the governments 'survival' rhetoric:

“... created a sense of eternal crisis and brought the Government and the governed together on board. A small resourceless State located in the Volatile sea of Southeast Asia had a permanent sense of siege about it.” (Singh 1992:175).

The government was able to implement its social engineering because of the smallness of the island, lack of political opposition and through the control of communications. The local controls used to contain any possible resistance to the PAP designed development were handled through the use of legislation.

#### Information Networks and the Media

This section looks at the influences and controls of the mass media in general, the next section will discuss the press in more detail. Western values, lifestyles and fashions were imported along with the Western technicians and the mass media that were part of the plan for

industrialization and modernization of Singapore. These “counter values” (Chen 1980:131) were seen to undermine the traditional values of the Singaporean culture. In the mass-media invasion, the TV, movies and radio have replaced traditional means of entertainment. The increased access of the population to the international media in the 1970s caused some concern to the government, and there has been increased restrictions placed on the media as a conveyor of ideas. TV and radio programmes come under government surveillance, the reception of some channels are restricted due to content not deemed appropriate for Singapore viewers. Other forms of the media like books, magazines, films, and videos are either banned or censored (Wilkinson 1988). This includes the dubbing of Cantonese films into Mandarin to match the government’s Speak Mandarin campaign (PCs).

The control of information and information technology by the state, allows the government to utilize the various media for its own purposes. The mass media is an instrument through which the government can promote its policies. The government is committed to certain values and used the media to disperse them:

“We want the mass media to reinforce, not to undermine the cultural values and social attitudes inculcated in our schools and universities.” (Lee in Milne and Mauzy 1990:26)

The social and cultural impacts of the global positioning of Singapore can be seen in the discrepancy in access to information technology. While the production of high-tech information machinery is carried on in Singapore, the citizens are not permitted to use satellite dishes to receive the information carried on the equipment they produce. The city-state is portrayed as on the leading edge of information technology yet the citizens of Singapore experience constant media censorship as part of the government’s local controls.



New information technology is used, by the state, to centralize control of information. Despite Singapore's image as a node on the Global Information Network (BBC 1990), the population continues to experience censorship in their access to information and the control of the press in one example..

### Limits to the Press

There are local controls on the press by the state. While the press is not owned by the state, newspapers are required to issue management shares only to government approved persons and this effectively makes the boards pro-PAP. In addition, there is no pre-censorship of the press but the government pressures for an acceptable press has resulted in a docile press with little opposition. For example: A *Straits Times* editor remarked, when discussing writing on politically sensitive issues: "At the end of the day, we have the same objectives as government. We don't want to see Singapore go down the drain" (Stackhouse 1994:A10). Singapore journalist often take sensitive issues directly to the government, rather than using the more public press.

The press is controlled "through licensing powers, informal advice, through use of criminal law and the government's ability to restructure newspaper ownership" (Milne and Mauzy 1990:26). In 1971 when one of the English language newspapers spoke out on sensitive issues, "Lee Kuan Yew then personally 'cross-examined' the manager of the bank handling the newspaper's account - which led to a foreclosure act, when the newspaper was able to meet the payments the government simply revoked the newspaper's printing license. In 1974 the government passed an ordinance allowing the government to revoke the printing license at any time. In 1982 and 1984 there were dramatic re-organizing of the newspapers' ownership in Singapore. The result was a merger of the three major dailies. The closure of two of these

papers resulted in the *Strait Times* being the only English language newspaper in Singapore (and it is pro-PAP/government) (Wilkinson 1988). In 1986 the government introduced restrictions on the foreign press distribution, through restricting the volume of sales and the stores which can sell them (PCs). The government claims these controls are needed to maintain ethnic harmony and social stability (Milne and Mauzy 1990). The control of the press by the government is 'out of fear of religious and racial conflict' - an idea that is dredged up from time to time to support repressive measures although there have been no actual racial riots or conflicts in Singapore since the union with Malaysia was dissolved.

Injunctions that curtail politicizing issues in the press limit debate on controversial issues. Global magazines<sup>26</sup> have been restricted for what the government calls: "engaging in the domestic policies of Singapore" (Rodan 1993:91). The reasoning behind this is that Singapore's political institutions and the ethnic tensions present are "too fragile" and "too sensitive to withstand Western style reporting and adversarial argument" (Andrews 1991:143). Professional groups have also been chastised for making comments, in the local newspapers, on the government's policy of press restrictions<sup>27</sup> (Rodan 1993). An example of the governmental control of the printed media was the 1983 banning of *Cosmopolitan* by the Culture Minister, who also attacked the local magazine *Female* "for its lack of moral position in its readers advice columns" (Wilkinson 1988:172). The advice columns are now more conservative in *Female*.

---

<sup>26</sup> The foreign press that has been subject to gazetting are: *Time*, *Asiaweek*, *Asian Wall Street Journal* and *Far Eastern Economic Review*. (Rodan 1993) August of 1993, during my stay, the *Economist* was gazetted for failing to print the full reply of the Singapore government in the letters to the editor column (in some local articles the magazine is referred to as a leftist publication). As a result, circulation was restricted to the current volume and only through approved shops.

<sup>27</sup> The Law Society, as a group, was substituted with a pro-government association to remove their power - an injunction by the government stops professional groups from commenting on politics - many education groups are restricted in political comments out of fear of loss of jobs within the education system (Wilkinson 1988).

Another aspect of the control of the press by the government is the state's ability to float ideas in the press to gauge public response before actually implementing policy. This way the public gets used to hearing what the government has to say on an issue before policy is set. The press is also used to present negative aspects of other countries in articles with no authorship or sources. The government's educates the public through the media, to encourage the acceptance of PAP inspired ideas (Vogel 1989).

### Internal Security Act

One of the strongest controls used locally by the government is the Internal Security Act (ISA). Dating from the British colonial state, this act was used against communism in the Malay peninsula during the 1950s when Singapore was part of the Malay colony. The act allows the government the ability to apprehend and hold with no charges persons deemed a threat to Singapore. This effectively controls the opposition to the PAP, if persons oppose the PAP and the current government then, in theory, they must oppose Singapore. The ISA was used in the 1960s and 1970s to subdue the opposition groups, including the left wing of the PAP - who separated over the merge with Malaysia.<sup>28</sup> In 1987, it was used again to foil a 'Marxist plot' by church workers.<sup>29</sup> In 1989, the government abolished *habeas corpus* and the right of appeal to Privy Council for those detained under the ISA and for all local lawyers (Regnier 1991). In 1976

---

<sup>28</sup> The ISA was first called the Internal Security Council and was used to control the communists in the late 1950s, in fact some of the PAP's union leaders were detained by the British. One of the most famous uses of the ISA was Operation Cold Storage, in February of 1963 111 people were detained by the security forces, including: 24 were executives of the Barisan Socialis (splinter group of PAP), 50 trade union executives (sympathetic to BS), 5 journalists and 11 students. This was just prior to an election and the merger with Malaya. The opposition was put 'in cold storage' until it was over. (Turnbull 1989)

<sup>29</sup> Twenty-two people were detained when the government had a confrontation with the church, in the interests of religious harmony the state insists on the separation of church and state - and this includes making comments on the government policy. Lee said: "So when an English-educated group tried the same techniques (as the communists) and moved into Christian students' union and got them to go political and moved into the Law Society and got the Law Society to take the government on, I think that was just stupidity. Its exactly what we are not going to allow and nobody is going to tell me that those are innocent democratic practices." (Lee in McDonald 1990:25)

there were only 40 persons detained under the ISA, by 1989 there were 488 detained (Williams 1992). The increase in detainees corresponds with the decline in PAP support at the polls. Nevertheless, there were opposition members elected to parliament despite the increased detentions.

#### Other Control Mechanisms

The government had many ways in which its policies and preferred behaviours are transmitted to the public. This section looks at three mechanisms of control used by the state to organize the population in the desired manner. The local housing committees, the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), and the 'creation' of an opposition are three different ways the government controls locally.

The local housing committees, the Community Consultative Committees (CCC), were developed by the PAP as a grassroots organization to disperse the political message of the PAP. The establishment of these organizations gave the government effective integration into the daily lives of the citizens and the government appointed representatives on the committees practice a top down approach to community development, rather than transmitting communication upward from the people. This allows the "government to keep a finger on the people's pulse" (Chan 1993:226). The government has gone so far as to threaten to cut off community services to those districts that voted against the PAP (Rodan 1993). The CCC's are a government tool to integrate the government into the private sphere of the citizen - a person's home is not their castle in Singapore (Wilkinson 1988).

NTUC is a party/government combination that actively controls unionism in Singapore. The rationale for this is the economic necessity of a stable labour climate for the MNCs. Wages for these union members are also controlled by a jointly run council, the National Wage Council.

The control of the labour force is reinforced by the economic development control exerted by the government through the Economic Development Board (EDB). The number of construction workers needed is controlled by the government releasing land to build on in the small land scarce state. Council determined wages of the production sector and the civil service formulates the amount that workers pay into the CPF, which in turn is used by the government to stimulate the economy. The interconnectivity of the different facets of Singapore government and personal life of the citizens resulted in compliance with the government policies as it appeared that the government has orchestrated an economic miracle.

### **Social Status and Women's Place**

Social class in Singapore has been a focus of many studies (see Kaye 1960, Buchanan 1972, Chen 1977, 1978) with the most recent by sociologists at the National University of Singapore (Quah *et al.* 1991). The main concern of these studies was whether Singapore society has become more or less divided by class and if this differentiation by class has overtaken ethnic divisions which have been the major division of society since the mid-nineteenth century. The perception of Singapore as a middle class nation is thought to be one of the signs that Singapore is a modern city state. The study by Stella Quah *et al.* (1991) was conducted in 1987 and they found that while division by class was increasing, ethnicity was still the major division of society in terms of residential and educational segregation.

The perception of modernity and the middle class society was based on the fact that all social and ethnic groups have increased their quality of life. Singapore's increased living standard was measured by indices like housing household income, education levels and the possession of certain consumer durables. All socio-economic groups have seen improvements in their life situation, but some groups have improved more than others (Quah *et al.* 1991) and this

has led to increased income gaps since 1981. This changing income gap was a result of the meritocratic<sup>30</sup> aims of the government, who supported high pay for those in high positions. The meritocratic base of government action was summed up by then prime minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1982:

"It is in the interests of the not-so-talented that the talented should be adequately rewarded for the contribution they can make to the total progress of Singapore."  
(Lee 1982:16)

"We shall lose our own Singapore-grown talent if our policies punish the outstanding and the talented by progressive income tax with the objective of income redistribution." (Lee 1982:19)

The reward for those who appear to be more meritorious was a better quality of life, that accompanies a rapid increase in real income. What is hidden in this system is the hardening of class differences as the income distribution gap widens.

Entrance to education facilities in Singapore is based on passing examinations at different ages. This focus on examinations and the subsequent placement in university or technical schools, is the key to future occupation and career advancement. This meritocracy is still the basis for most advancement in Singapore, including social mobility. Those who have a family income which can allow for long periods of education and which can assist in preparations for the all important exams, will do well in the job market where education status is the key to better occupation status. One of the top symbols of social class is money and this is a direct reflection of occupation and education (Wong 1981, Quah *et al.* 1991). For women the education catch-up

---

<sup>30</sup> A meritocracy is an ideology based on the natural, hereditary intelligence and that talented people should be rewarded for their contribution. This is in opposition of socialist ideas that each person contributes to society and thus deserve to be treated equally. In a meritocratic society, those with more education or 'talent' as measured by IQ tests deserve their high status and high pay jobs and thus their high social class. As Blum states: "The upper class deserves their privileged positions and lower classes are capable of nothing more than unskilled work." (1984:84) The examinations of the school system are used to support the social divisions. The meritocratic ideology is used to support and reinforce unequal systems that advantage the wealthy, upper classes, who control the power and systems used to determine who is meritocratic. (see Blum and Chan & Chee 1984)

of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a generation of women who were able to find careers in occupations that held more social status than they previous were able. This did not happen for the majority of women as in the meritocracy, only the women perceived as being more talented were able to participate. The changes of the education program (discussed further in Chapter 4) effectively lowered women's position in society when a two tiered entrance program was introduced.

Social mobility, in a meritocracy, is “premised on intellectual or educational achievement or supposed ‘ability’, usually taken to mean mental ability” (Chee 1988). If Lee’s eugenics ideology<sup>31</sup> is assumed to be correct then those who are on the top of the social pyramid are presumed to have inherited the required intelligence to be there. This reinforces the current social structure, reducing social mobility and “justifying the existing class hierarchy” (Chee 1988). The social structure of Singapore is then based on two systems of social standing, the first suggests that all a person must do is work hard and they will be able to move up socially. The second system uses eugenics to justify the upper class and their right to be (and remain) at the top of the social ladder. In his article on material culture, Daniel Miller reports that the assumption of social mobility through education is illusory, “The rise of mass education saw a decline in social mobility and merely an inflation in employer’s demands for qualifications” (1987:151). Thus social mobility through education and the increased emphasis on a

---

<sup>31</sup> Eugenics is based on the presumption that a persons abilities are hereditary and that nurturing (education and environment) plays a small role in the intelligence and capability of person. Lee cites Prof. Bouchard’s research into twins, who’s results conclude that 80% is nature and 20% is nurture. Using this base, Lee projects that the most able are the top in education examinations. He and most of his cabinet are examples of this, they were the ‘bumper’ crop of educated Singaporeans.(Lee in Saw 1990, Chan & Chee 1984) Lee’s support of a eugenics based policy was central to the changes in the population policy. The low reproduction rate of the well educated and the higher rate of the non-educated women would, in Lee’s opinion - “that the small number of graduate women getting married and having children meant that Singapore’s pool of intelligent genes was diminishing.” (Lim 1993:106)



meritocratic society by the government has done little to changed the social status of the majority of Singaporeans (Quah *et al.* 1991).

### Internalized Values

The state's control of society can be accomplished through subtle mechanisms of discipline and punishment. This section looks at ways that the government creates an orderly society in Singapore.<sup>32</sup>

The control and socialization of the citizens through internalized values maintains an ordered and disciplined society. The use of regimentation and uniforms from daycare through high school, the mandatory military service for men, and the control of working times by the government all work to create a society that internalizes the correct behaviours readily. The low crime rate and the well behaved citizens are used to show the world how well Singapore is doing in its development of a modern society. The citizens are simultaneously harangued about not 'measuring up', a perceived amorality is promoted by the government through many campaigns such as the "Killer Litter", "Productivity Month" and "Courtesy Campaign". The Singaporeans are told that they are discourteous, non-productive and uncaring about their environment at the same time that they are extolled that they are 'talented' and so much better than the rest of the developing countries (Wilkinson 1988). Conformity is constantly pressed upon the population, in order to internalize group conformity on what are appropriate social behaviours.

Achievement orientation when internalized cannot be restricted to one aspect of life, for example the competition encouraged in the schools is expected to become consensus in the workplace, where the employees are expected to work together to solve work challenges but

---

<sup>32</sup> For the theoretical background to the understanding of these methods, Michel Foucault (1979) or Clammer (1985) are useful to identify mechanisms of control. Although these two differ, both look at the modern mechanisms of control of society, one in Europe and one in Singapore.

more often they compete and undermine each other for job promotions (PCs). What is praised in the education system is seen as a negative in the workplace, where job hopping for the best wage or position is growing. The increased consumerism and job hopping, are compatible with the achievement orientation extolled in the schools and derived from the same underlying principle, but this behaviour is called decadent and Western (Vente 1980) in Singapore.

The individual in Singapore is told to be the best that they can be, but only for the community. The moment the individual appears more interested in themselves the government comes out with another program to control the social change in Singapore. The academic performance of each individual makes a large difference to the social class and the future positioning of the family. The individualism of a meritocracy is only useful until a person is involved in the industrial workplace, at which time there is no emphasis on the individual but only on the social grouping of family, work or country.

#### Singapore and Changing Values

One manner of local control used by the government is the repeated exhortation by the government on how the Western values being displayed by the youth are weakening Singapore's moral structures like the family. In opposition to these decadent values are the traditional 'Asian' values supported by the government. The recent government campaigns to re-establish 'Asian' traditions through language and the education system denounces the individualism and materialism that are labeled Western in the values debate (Kumar 1992). The focus on 'values' by the Singapore government takes the pressure off the widening social class gaps.

There are similarities in the ideal 'Western' and 'Asian' value systems - honesty, hard work, the family, saving and respect for authority are common to both. The systems are not so different but the need to maintain a more authoritarian society by the PAP means that individual

rights will be controlled by means of the 'values debate' and the push to look East - at the authoritarian system of Japan. Full democratic rights will not be attained until Singapore has a stable economic form (Rieger 1989).

The dialectic of identification with the ethnic origins (Malay, Chinese and Indian) and with the Western economies can be seen in the national language programs.<sup>33</sup> The global language of English is used and promoted as the language of business, while the promotion of ethnic languages keeps the population relating locally to their ethnic group. English is not a 'mother tongue' but merely a pragmatic response to necessity. English medium education is, as opposed to the ethnic languages, the "prize of the main medium of education" (Puru Shotam 1989:511). English is the language of economic necessity as Singapore relies on the international economic system.

"On the other hand, each citizen's mother tongue and its Asian cultural backing are not neglected: here the policy is to preserve a sense of Asian identity and self-expression for all, and to resist or reject certain decadent aspects of Western society transmitted by the English language and media." (Regnier 1991:251).

Asian identity, through language, is juxtapositioned to the Western individualism and the use of English (Pakir 1992). The use of English also prevents too much connection with the ethnic group and ethnic origin country (Wilkinson 1988). The bi-lingual policy makes each person global (English) and local (ethnic) at the same time. The international outlook is encourages for economic and business but the government encourages local ethnic identity in the social and political spheres (Milne and Mauzy 1990). This method of divide and confuse means that the national identity of Singaporeans is divided between the global image and the local ethnic image.

---

<sup>33</sup> The bi-lingual education policy in Singapore is related to the state having 4 official languages: English, Malay, Indian and Mandarin. The education system tries to teach each student two languages, English and the ethnic language that corresponds to their declared ethnicity. English is the *lingua franca* of the ethnic groups, it is the only common communication. (Pakir 1992).

### Changing Faces - Political changes and Societal Responses

In a recent text on Singapore, even the title implies that Singapore is a creation of imagination - *Imagining Singapore* (Ban *et al.* 1992a). The perceived realities of life experiences in Singapore are explored as the identity of 'What is Singapore?' is researched. The representation of the city state involves the language of 'survival': the "psycho-drama of ejection and of being left out in the wilderness" (Ban *et al.* 1992b:3) Singapore as a society has the need to signify "what the state is", in the beginning during independence from the need to 'pull together' to survive, to signifying the state as part of the world culture through technology and rationality, and now the increasing need to signify what the country is through the re-signifying of cultural traditions. Throughout the representation and re-presentation of Singapore there are dueling discourses, first one which stresses the 'real world' pragmatism and the other which emphasizes and uses imagination (Ban *et al.* 1992b). The perceptions of the population, with regards to government policy, hinges on both of these discourses being present. The reason for most policies is stated in the pragmatic rationality, while they also depend on imagination and the fear of vulnerability if the directed course is not followed. National identity is one facet of these two discourses. The perceived national identity is formed by positioning Singapore in the global and local spheres, first in the global sphere, it is vulnerable to global economic shifts, and in locally, internal differences will weaken Singapore.

Singapore is now listed as the 20th richest country in the world and it is now classed as a 'developed' country, but this does not mean that the wealth is distributed equally (Singh 1992). The dual realities of Singapore can be seen in the different housing districts, some HDB complexes are predominantly poor with few facilities, but other areas of the city are comprised of large homes on private yards with walls and guard dogs (PN). Although there has been a

dramatic increase in income for the majority of Singaporeans, there is a widening income gap as the income of the top 20% have increase at a much higher rate than the bottom 20%. This gap, the rising cost of living, and a rising expectation of the young people caused concern for the government (*Straits Times* 16/08/1993). According to Ow (1984), there is an increasing trend amongst young Singaporeans to take the good things in life for granted, economic affluence has made them complacent and demanding. The focus on the 'decadence' of youth was connected with the political swing since 1981 (Wilkinson 1988).

The youth of Singapore want political change, speaking with their feet and votes (Milne and Mauzy 1990). Singaporeans are growing tired of slogans and being spoon fed by the 'Father Knows Best' government (Koh 1987a, 1987b, Andrews 1991, Chan 1993), as a result thousands are emigrating. The emigration of Singaporeans has been growing the past few years. According to the only local English newspaper, emigration was only 1,000 in 1970 and had reached 4,000 per year by 1988 (*Straits Times* 09/08/1989:15). But an article in *Far Eastern Economic Review* reports that in 1988, 4700 families left (Balakrishnan 1990b), double the rate of the early 1980s, and according to the *Pacific Century* (1992) video 16,000 emigrated in 1989, the majority of whom were young professionals who have experienced the new affluence and have been more exposed to the lifestyles of other industrializing nations through travels abroad for education (one-third of the non-student resident population were educated overseas (Lau 1993)).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has been concerned with the Singaporean images. The global city and the local Asian city are two sides of the same coin as Singapore develops a niche in the global, regional and local spheres. The government's unique political position for the past 35 years has

created a state which is thoroughly imbedded in the individuals' life. In this chapter I have shown how tangled the idea of a Singapore identity is, from the political rhetoric of 'survival' to the dual language policies. From this search for national identity, the imagination of the Singapore population is drawn into the political and economic states.

The added pressures of the government's social engineering makes the negotiation of personal identity difficult in this modern urban state. The control of the media, the education system and the social behaviours of the populace result in a seemingly well behaved city state. I have shown in this chapter that the pressure on women and men are continuous and often changing with the political will of the state. The complexity of life for women is apparent through the many legislative changes explored in this chapter. The geography of the social landscape of Singapore in which women are searching and refining their perceptions of female identity were shown in this chapter. The many images of 'what is a Singapore woman' and the many aspects of her roles over her life cycle are explored further in chapter four.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Women and the Social Landscape of Singapore**

#### **Women in the Social Landscape**

“Women’s roles and women’s status are intrinsically linked to their productive and reproductive activities, their class and ethnic affiliations.” (Wong 1981:434)

This chapter looks at the social landscape of Singapore and how it effects the positions of women and their role in society. In addition to the local controls examined in Chapter 3, the government’s policies on employment, education, housing and population are other features of Singapore that influence women in their negotiation of femininity on a daily basis. In this rapidly changing social landscape women find themselves choosing different paths between traditional feminine roles and newly evolving roles. Census data and government policies will be used to show the changes in women’s roles over the last thirty years. The modernization of Singapore has involved more than changes in employment and infrastructure, it contains an emergence of globalism and individualism couched within nationalism and the traditional. The first section of this chapter looks at class and ethnic elements of the social landscape to show how these divided women into advantaged and disadvantaged groups. The second section includes government policies and how these relate directly to women and their perception of themselves within the global/local dialectic present in Singapore. The final section shows the images of femininity by using marriage as an example of the changing images of women and how they negotiate the local/global interface in Singapore in society.

### Social Features

The social position of women in Singapore has improved over the past thirty years. In 1976, Yu Yee Shoon wrote that: "The women of Singapore owe the gains they have made and their equal status with men largely to the socialist aims and ideas which the PAP set out to achieve." (1976:114) This author supported the idea that with the passage of the 1961 Women's Charter<sup>34</sup> and the educational and industrial pushes automatically gave women equality with men. There was little consideration of the social changes, or lack of them, for women. Women were expected to respond to the government's programs for the survival of the country (Regnier 1991). The introduction of new roles and opportunities for women, as a result of the Singapore's entry into the global assembly line, were in addition to their previous traditional, cultural roles. As will be shown in a latter section, women were needed for Singapore's entry into the global industrial complex, and this more than anything placed women at the juncture of global and local identities.

The three major ethnic groups in Singapore are found in all social classes. In the work by Quah *et al.* (1991) the majority of the upper class are Chinese but due to their 77% of ethnic composition they are also well represented in the middle and lower classes. In Singapore social class and ethnicity divide women from each other in Singapore (through housing programs and socio-economic background), but all experience the global pressures of modernity. With the rapid economic growth of the past thirty years, all ethnic groups in Singapore have improved

---

<sup>34</sup> The Women's Charter passed in 1961 was part of the political platform of the PAP in their bid for election in 1959. This legislation regulated marital rights for women: 1) polygamy was banned, 2) married women had the right to use her own name and conduct business and own property in her own name 3) wives and children had the right to support by the husband and father. In 1980 amendments were made to the Charter: 1) women were able to receive a share of the familial property even if she did not contribute cash towards it, 2) battered women had the right to an injunction barring the batterer from the home, 3) married women could have a residence separate from her husband. The Women's Charter is directed at married women and not at the status of women as individuals, the implicit statement is that married women is the proper position for women. (Lim 1993, Wee 1987).



their living standard, but women are still socialized as subordinate in all ethnic groups (Wong 1986). That women have taken on new roles in addition to their traditional 'unpaid' work in the domestic sphere, has not been investigated as one of the reasons for the economic success of Singapore (however, E. Quah has worked for many years to show the economic contribution women make through domestic activities). Women's subordinate positioning makes their contribution to the economic changes less visible, but no less vital.

The women in each of the ethnic are subject to this subordinate positioning to a greater or lesser degree depending on the need for women to work and the family support networks still in place (Siddique 1989). As the need for a woman's income increases, her decision making abilities increase and thus more control within the household is gained (Blumberg 1988, Sen 1990)<sup>35</sup>. Young women also gain more control of their choice of marriage partners as their contribution to the household income increases. Women's behaviour, their position in society and their timing of marriage will often depend on their employment opportunities, which are dependent on their education attainment (Quah 1993).

### **Government, Policy and Women**

There is a continuity in the ideas about women by the Singapore government: concern was never about 'liberating' women from the 'shackles' of social, cultural, political and economic exploitation. The concern was (and is) how women can best serve the nation. Governments, including Singapore, embarking on a global program of economic growth and industrialization face the social consequences that result. For women the major effect of

---

<sup>35</sup> A. Ong (1987) has researched the autonomy of young Malay electronics workers and shows that income increases women's power within the female power structure of the household. This is also found in China, where there is a matriarchal power structure mirroring the patriarchal structure, women's power grows as they ascend the hierarchy. Young women, and the benefits of their wages, gain more control of things such as dating, clothing and food which would fall under her mother's control.

economic change is the increased pressure to participate in wage labour. As women respond to these new roles in the global work force there were new, modern, domestic responses created to meet their new roles. The changing social roles of women were part of the government's policies of economic and social change, in fact very "few aspects of life there escape the Government's [sic] penchant for control and organization" (Goldberg 1987). The government's interest in women appears to be from the aim of "maximizing them as a human resource for the production of labour and children in an industrializing society" (Koh and Wee 1987) Women, then, are at the intersection of the state, the community and the household; and this creates tensions for women as they seek compromises between these multi-dimensional roles.

The passage of the Women's Charter in 1961 marked a high point in women's rights as Singapore embarked on its integration with the global economy. In the intense push for global economic participation in the 1970s, women were encouraged to continue their education and to join the labour force, but they were reminded of their real role. In P.M. Lee's speech marking the International Women's Year in 1975, while supporting the removal of biases against women he states:

"On the whole, we have been fortunate in educating our women, opening up jobs for them, and having them more independent, without too great an upset in traditional family relationships. ... Our primary concern is to ensure that, whilst all our women become equal to men in education, getting employment and promotions, the family framework in bringing up the next generation does not suffer as a result of high divorce rates, or, equally damaging, neglect of the children, with both parents working." (Lee in Wee 1987:8-9)

Women could participate in the global system as long as they maintained the local traditional roles that did not cause change to the family. The need for women in the labour force and the desire to maintain a traditional social landscape has contributed to the conflict of women's position in society. Women's position has improved economical and legally (Wong and Leong

1993c), but the social pendulum has swung to the right since the 1970s. Women, and their reproductive role, have become more and more the focus of government attention as the family and Asian values became a vital part of social policy.

### Women and The Global Economy

When Singapore decided to embark on a globalized industrialization in the 1960s, new roles for women emerged. To attract the multinational corporations (MNC), Singapore offered many incentives to locate factories on the island, one of these was the promise of a controllable work force, which was compliant and cheap. Women were recruited to fill the many production positions in these factories, and according to government reports, the labour intensive industries “required female workers” (Low *et al.* 1993). Accompanying these changes in women’s economic role were changes in the household (Salaff and Wong 1984, Salaff 1988). The removal of women from the domestic sphere for forty hours a week, often on shift work, meant that other women had to shoulder the unpaid labour of the household (daughters, aunts or mothers). The changes in employment structure also affected the value of women’s domestic and unpaid family labour, it was less valued as the society moved into a mass produced and consumer based economy (Quah 1988). As has been found in other nations which participated in the new global assembly line, the gendered aspect of industrialization can intensify, decompose or recompose gender subordination (Ward 1984) and in Singapore it appears to do all three in different social areas.

After 1965, the government’s development programs were needed as the country’s “economic and political survival was at stake” (Low *et al.* 1993). With equal access to education and employment, women have “risen to the occasion and have proven their ability by their many contributions. ... Women have become a valuable partner in development whether by their

biological or economic production functions” (Low *et al.* 1993). Women were recruited to fill the thousands of production and assembly jobs in the MNCs. The increase in corporations in Singapore was followed by an increase in demand for labour in the service sector, and women again were recruited. The majority of women responded to the state’s rhetoric of labour force participation as a national duty (see Chapter 3).

The total number of women in the labour force increased from 84,200 in 1957 to over 573,000 in 1990 (see Table 4-1). This was a seven times increase in the number of women working in the labour force.

**Table 4-1**  
**Distribution of Female Labour Force by Industry, In Thousands**  
**1957-1990**

	1957	1970	1980	1990
<b>Number in ‘000</b>				
<b>Manufacturing</b>	16.3	48.1	148.9	188.0
<b>Construction</b>	1.8	2.8	5.2	7.6
<b>Commerce</b>	13.2	29.0	77.9	129.0
<b>Transport &amp; Communication</b>	1.1	3.9	18.6	29.6
<b>Financial &amp; Business</b>	2.0	5.3	33.8	74.2
<b>Community, social &amp; personal</b>	39.6	58.8	79.9	143.7
<b>Others*</b>	10.2	5.7	4.4	1.5
<b>Total</b>	84.2	153.6	368.7	573.6

\*Others include agriculture, mining, and activities not adequately defined.

Source: Low, L. *et al.* “Economic Participation” in *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change* eds. Aline Wong and Leong Wai Kum. citing Census of Population, 1957, 1970, 1980, 1990.

The categories where women are concentrated have changed over this period; from a cluster in the community, social and personal category, in 1957, to a concentration in manufacturing in 1980 and finally to a more balanced distribution in 1990, with manufacturing, community etc. and commerce accounting for 80% of the female labour force (see Table 4-2).

**Table 4-2**  
**Distribution of Female Labour Force by Industry, In Percentage**  
**1957-1990**

	1957	1970	1980	1990
<b>Percentage Distribution</b>				
<b>Manufacturing</b>	19.4	31.3	40.4	32.8
<b>Construction</b>	2.1	1.8	1.4	1.3
<b>Commerce</b>	15.7	18.9	21.1	22.5
<b>Transport &amp; Communication</b>	1.3	2.5	5.0	5.2
<b>Financial &amp; Business</b>	2.4	3.5	9.2	12.9
<b>Community, social &amp; personal</b>	47.0	38.3	21.7	25.1
<b>Others*</b>	12.1	3.7	1.2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\*Others include agriculture, mining, and activities not adequately defined.

Source: Low, L. *et al.* "Economic Participation" in *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change* eds. Aline Wong and Leong Wai Kum, citing Census of Population, 1957, 1970, 1980, 1990.

The large shift in employment can be associated with the drive for industrialization and the push for women to actively participate in the development of Singapore as a modern nation from 1965 through 1980. In 1957 the female labour force participation (LFP) was only 21.6% (see Table 4-3). The LFP of women has increased over the next thirty years to an average of 50.3% in 1990.

**Table 4-3**  
**Singapore Labour Force Participation Rates, 1957, 1970, 1980,**  
**and 1990 (Selected Age Cohorts)**

Age and Gender		1957	1970	1980	1990
<b>Total Population</b>	Total		46.6	63.2	64.9
	Males		67.6	81.5	79.2
	Females	21.6	24.6	44.3	50.3
<b>15 to 19 years old</b>	Total		49.5	49.1	28.1
	Males		55.7	47.5	28.4
	Females	23.4	43.0	50.7	27.8
<b>20 to 24 years old</b>	Total		73.5	86.1	82.0
	Males		92.9	93.4	84.3
	Females	22.9	53.6	78.4	79.6
<b>25 to 29 years old</b>	Total		64.5	78.3	86.0
	Males		98.0	97.2	95.4
	Females	16.5	30.8	58.7	76.3
<b>30 to 34 years old</b>	Total		60.0	71.5	80.2
	Males		98.3	97.9	96.6
	Females	17.3	22.7	44.2	63.0
<b>40 to 44 years old</b>	Total		60.8	65.8	75.1
	Males		98.1	97.6	97.6
	Females	26.3	17.8	33.2	51.9
<b>50 to 54 years old</b>	Total		55.0	56.3	61.2
	Males		88.1	89.6	88.2
	Females	28.8	17.8	20.4	34.1

Source: Quah, Stella (1993) "Marriage and Family" in *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change* eds. by Aline Wong & Leong Wai Kum. pp. 20-85. citing Min. of Finance & Dept. of Statistics.

The use of average figures in LFP rates hides the variation that occurs over the life cycle.

As shown in Table 4-3, the LFP for 15 to 19 years of age has fallen dramatically as more young people remain in the education system, from 49.5% to 28.1% between 1970 and 1990.

Conversely the participation rate for young people between 25 and 29 years has increased from 64.5% to 86.0%, with male LFP decreasing and female LFP increasing rapidly from 30.8% to 76.3%. The peak of labour force participation for females occurs in the 20-24 year cohort throughout the period of record for this table, and a pattern of steady decline in older cohorts is

also apparent. Singapore does not have a return peak, in the 35-44 cohort, that was found in other industrial and industrializing nations. Women leaving the labour force after marriage are not likely to return unless there is an economic necessity (Quah 1988, 1990b).

By 1975 studies revealed that women were needed in the labour force out of economic necessity, by the government and by the household, as the cost of living grew in Singapore (Chan 1975, Wong 1976). A survey by the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations (SCWO) indicated married women who continue to work turned down promotions due to conflicting roles (Lim 1993). Women workers continue to be an integral part of the government's plan for rapid technological advances in the 1990s as Singapore aims to become the hub of the global information highway in Southeast Asia (BBC 1990).

The participation of women in the global industrialization of Singapore can be seen in the rapid increase in the numbers employed in wage labour. The doubling of the female labour force between 1957 and 1970 and again between 1970 and 1980 (see Table 4-1), shows that women responded to the government's call to participate in the global economy. The ages of the women who participated in wage labour has also changed as a result of the increased demand for skilled and educated workers, and can be seen in the decline of women between 15 and 19 years and the rapid increase in women between 20 and 29 years in the labour force. The role of many women in the twenty years from 1960 to 1980 has shifted from unpaid family business worker to a paid employee in global industry. Lifestyle changes affecting women, and their perception of their position in society, occurred as more and more women joined the labour force.

Women, in the 1980s, were still in 'feminine' jobs, like teaching and nursing, which tend to fit into society's notion of appropriate roles (Aware 1988). Since the 1950s women have

increased in these occupational categories with respect to men. Until the 1950s, men dominated as teachers and secretaries, but with more opportunities to climb up the occupation ladder as the British left, women were recruited for these positions which are now perceived as ‘feminine’ jobs. In 1980 teachers and nurses accounted for 60% of the women in the professional and manager occupation class (which employed only 16% of female workers) (Low *et al.* 1993). In 1990, women were still predominantly in the nurturing occupations: nursing, social worker, secretary, teacher, and retail sales, when the large production worker class is eliminated.

Young income earning women have increased in ‘value’ in the natal household and in her marital household (Lim 1982) and:

“Women have become a valuable partner in development whether by their biological or economic production functions.” (Low *et al.* 1993)

Women and the government’s image of women were centered around the contributions they could make to the growth of Singapore, first through their role in economic production and, more recently, through their reproductive functions.

### Population Policies and Women

In 1959, when the PAP first took power in Singapore, there was a very high birth rate, due in part to the recent migration of women and the attainment of near equal gender ratios on the island. The rapid growth of the population led to increased demand for housing, a rise in unemployment, and a strain on the infrastructure of the small city state. With independence in 1965, the drive for industrialization was accompanied by a social program of population control. The population policy included many incentives and disincentives for women to control their reproduction, discussed latter in this section.



The combination of rapid increase in female employment with the government's population program<sup>36</sup> resulted in the birth rate falling dramatically in the next ten years. Another feature which became apparent was the postponement of marriage, the age of marriage rose from 24.7 years old in 1957 to 26.6 in 1990 for women with men slightly higher (Quah 1993). The rising age of marriage and an extension in the years in the workplace created what the government calls a crisis in reproduction. A change in attitude towards marriage and children was needed according to the government in the early 1980s.

The ideal family in Singapore until 1983 was no more than two children, but with the results of the 1980 Census and then the 1984 election, there were many changes to the image of the ideal family.

“The 1980 Census disclosed that whilst we have brought down the birth rate, we have reduced it most unequally. The better educated the woman is, the less children she has.” (Lee in Saw 1990:42)

The government's concern was that educated women were not marrying or if they married were having only one or two children, while the women with little education were more than replacing themselves. As part of his eugenics and meritocracy beliefs, Lee laments that Singapore is threatened by this ‘loss of talented’ children.<sup>37</sup> The change in the direction of the government's population policy can be seen in Lee's 1983 Independence Day speech, where the lop-sided re

---

<sup>36</sup> The state's population policy in the 1960s and 1970s was with the goal of the ‘two child family’. This was to reduce the birth rate and reduce the demands on social services. Seven specific disincentives were: 1) lower priority of third and subsequent birth order in school admission, 2) higher delivery charges in hospitals for each additional child, 3) no priority for HDB flat allocation (family maximum of 4 persons), 4) no income tax relief for fourth or subsequent children, 5) priority in school selection for families where one parent has undergone sterilization, 6) no maternity leave after the second child, 7) only persons with less than three children can sublet a room in their flat (Chen, Kuo and Chung 1982). Liberal sterilization and abortion policies resulted in 39,734 female sterilization's, 1,650 male sterilization's and 33,443 abortions (Kuo and Wong 1979).

<sup>37</sup> The changing demographics of Singapore included a drop in the Chinese ethnic group from 78.3% to 77.7%. The Chinese had the lowest fertility rate and the Malay's had the highest, the Chinese were no longer replacing themselves. The new population policy, for educated women to have more children, hides the fact that almost 90% of the graduate women are Chinese. The opening of immigration to ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong can be seen as a move to increase the Chinese % in Singapore. (Lau 1992a)

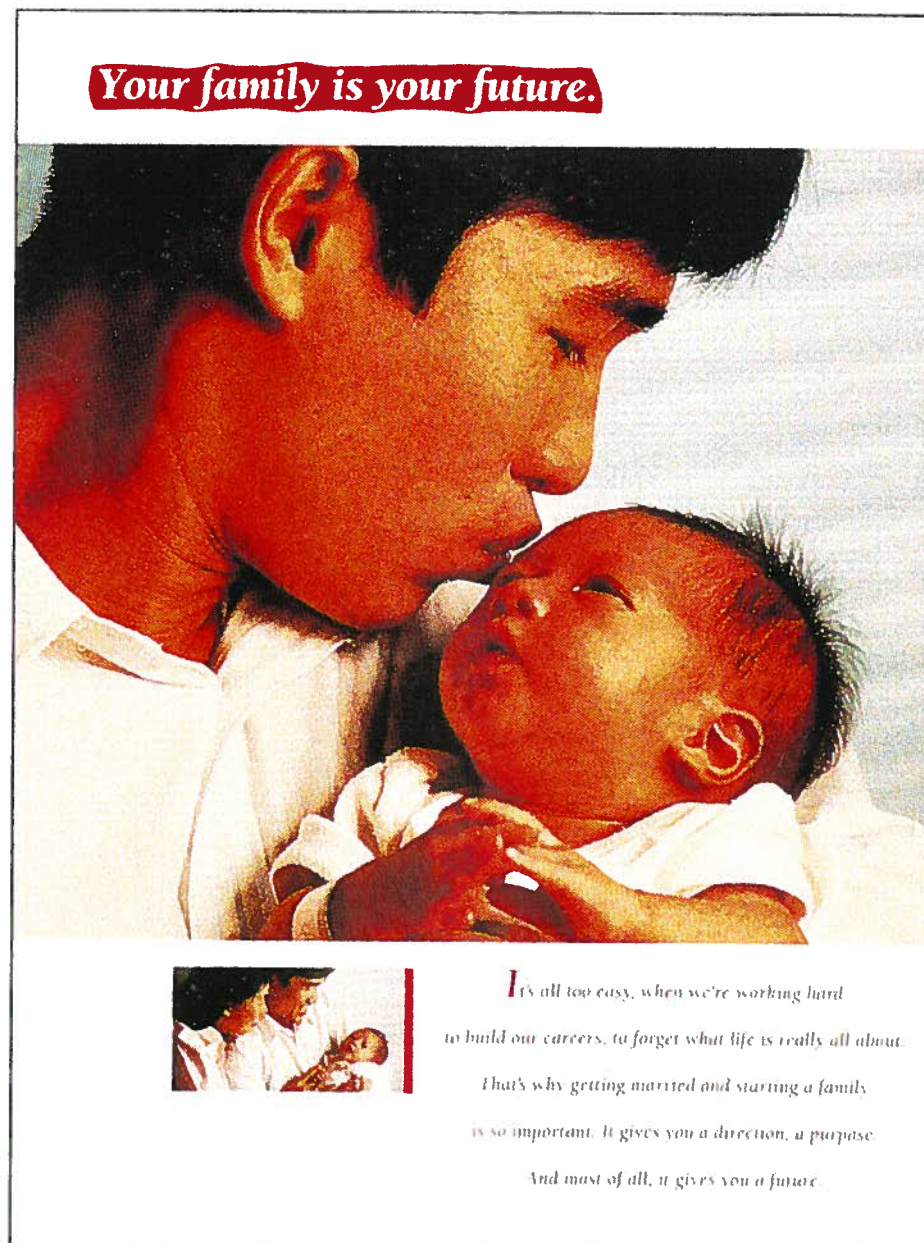


Figure 4-1: A Family Planning poster that supports the current population policy, 1993. (Wong and Leong 1993a:22)

production rates gathered attention and a full media push for ‘balancing reproduction’ followed with articles and editorials on the need for graduate (‘talented’) women to marry and reproduce (see Figure 4-1 for an example of posters).<sup>38</sup> The view of the ‘talented’ as the salvation of Singapore was emphasized in Lee’s speech,

“If we continue to reproduce ourselves in this lop-sided way, we will be unable to maintain our present standards. Levels of competency will decline.

Our economy will falter, the administration will suffer, and the society will decline. For how can we avoid lowering performance when for every two graduates (with some exaggeration to make the point) in 25 years time there will be one graduate and for every two uneducated workers there will be three” (Lee in Saw 1990:43)

Further on in his speech, Lee emphasizes his point that high quality citizens are an asset to the country and then places the responsibility for the lop-sided reproduction of Singapore squarely on the shoulders of women (and the previous government policies which treated them equally):

“Our most valuable asset is in the ability of our people. Yet we are frittering away this asset through the unintended consequences of changes in our education policy and equal career opportunities for women. This has affected their traditional role as mothers.” (Lee in Saw 1990:44)

“We must further amend our policies, and try to reshape our demographic configuration so that our better-educated women will have more children to be adequately represented in the next generation. ... Equal employment opportunities, yes, but we shouldn’t get our women into jobs where they cannot, at the same time, be mothers. ... You just can’t be doing a full-time heavy job like that of a doctor or engineer and run a home and bring up children.” (Lee in Wee 1987:9)

Lee’s regret in treating women equally stemmed from his concern that well educated women were not reproducing at a rate that would ensure a good supply of the most able and ‘talented’ to manage the country.<sup>39</sup> The issue of women’s reproduction was reflected in another area of social

---

<sup>38</sup> This new population policy campaign was called “Breeding for Brilliance,” the name was later dropped but the eugenics aspect of the program remained (Sherwell 1994:18).

<sup>39</sup> Contrary to much of the information about lop-sided reproduction rates, Yap Mui Tenh (1989) found that after fifteen years of marriage women with tertiary education averaged 2.5 children, much higher than the 1.65 used by Lee in his 1983 speech (Saw 1990). How data on births and fertility are interpreted is another area worth research in Singapore.

engineering - the school system. Hot-on-the-heels of the changes in population policy, in 1984, were the changes to the education system, discussed in the next section.

Current population policy influences the choices of women through a system of incentives and disincentives. Economic incentives for well educated women to have more children was a main focus of changes to the population policy. The economic incentives offered to the well educated women will work to increase the existing social inequalities between the upper and lower classes (Chee 1988). If those who could best afford children were given financial aid to have more children, they would be able to offer the children even better conditions which could exacerbate the income gap between the socio-economic groups (Chee 1988).

Some of the incentives offered to educated women included: more subsidized childcare, sick-child leave, no-pay leave, priority registration in school for the third or more child, and enhanced tax relief (Koh and Wee 1987). The tax rebates in the following years re-inforced the financial advantages for educated women to bear children. Rebates increased to \$20,000 for every fourth child and a 15% tax rebate for the mother. The rebates are even age specific to encourage early marriage and births, “a woman who has her second child before she is 28 has more tax rebates than one who has a second child after that” (Balakrishnan 1990a) (a woman can, if she produces children at the right time, live without paying taxes for 14 years).

The shift in reproduction policy from an anti-natalist to a pro-natalist stance by the government, and the perceived problem of single well-educated women, came during the period of diminished popularity for the PAP, and with a decline in overall Chinese ethnicity in the 1990 census results. The success of the government’s education and labour force policies could also be credited with the increase in single well-educated women. The control of this emerging group

of women and their reproductive patterns were to be maintained through the incentives for reproduction described above.

While offering educated women incentives to produce more 'talented' children, the government also provided incentives for lesser educated women to reduce the number of children they had. The previous anti-natalist policies were still in effect for these women, including the higher costs of medical care and disadvantages of more children in home purchasing. Additionally the government announced a "Sterilization cash incentive" as an "anti-natalist eugenic measure aimed at discouraging the poor and lesser-educated parents"(Saw 1990:10) from having more than two children. A women could get a \$10,000 grant for being sterilized. This money could only be used for retirement or for the purchase of a HDB flat (in 1987 this amount was almost one third of the cost of a flat). In August of 1993 the government proposed a new scheme to aid 'lower income couples' with their 'reproduction decisions'. "Up to \$26,400 in housing grants and education bursaries to be paid out over a period of up to 20 years" (*Straits Times* 16/08/1993:1) for poor families (with no N-level passes) to have no more than two children. Families which needed more children for higher household income were destined to remain in the lower levels of the income strata without more household members working. The maternity and unpaid child sick leave were not made available to the less educated, and usually poorer, women. Lower income women are most affected by these population policies, these women will have to toe the line as they face the withdrawal of government services if they do not comply to family planning programs (Chee 1988).

The population policy tends to reflect the ideology of the ruling classes, particularly relating to the position of women in society (Chee 1988). In the case of Singapore, the ruling class and the government are the same and the population policy is a direct reflection of women's

perceived position (including ethnic and social class positions). The lack of control over her personal body and the responses of women to the policy changes are reasons for a closer look at the micro-level pressures and resistance's to body control. The connection of national interest and procreation is part of the web of influences which creates a conflict of identity for women.

The enshrining of women as mother has carried on for centuries, through tradition and the power of the *status quo*. Policy makers have called upon these traditional roles and pressed women back into the domestic sphere, after a brief *sortie* in the public sphere (Goldberg 1987). The Singapore government's concern for the quality of the population and the 'balance' of the ethnic groups was used to reinforce the position of women and the family in society. The Asian values called upon to support this policy placed the family as the main building block of society and enshrined the family as a 'core value' of Singapore. The changes in reproduction policy and the values debate indicates that there is a shift from purely economic 'survival' tactics to a more social 'ethical' tactics in citizen control by the government.

### Education and Women

Education is the most important determinant of initial occupation, career advancement or lifelong income and social status in Singapore (Lim 1993, Quah 1993). Education plays a dual role in the creation of Singapore's citizens. First it trains people as highly skilled workers who can compete in the global assembly line. Secondly, as part of the social engineering the 'core values' are taught from primary through university (Regnier 1991, Borthwick 1992). Women experienced a shifting in the social engineering of the state in the education system, first through the push for equality in the 1960s and then through the defense of difference in the 1980s as the government balancing act of the global/local interface continues. Women are experiencing the

push to maintain traditional cultural roles, at the same time they are encouraged to learn English and further their education to take their place within the global economy.<sup>40</sup>

Women's access to education and educational levels increased in the years following independence. This was largely due to the increasing demands for a well-educated and trainable workforce. As women made up a large majority of those needed by the MNCs, they received better and longer years of schooling. In 1968, women were encouraged through education policy to participate in technical programs on an equal basis as men, with the government's aim to have 50% of all science and technical program participants female (Wee 1987).

In 1983, there was a 'crisis in education' when more women than men were accepted at the National University of Singapore. The government set about to correct the 'imbalance' by changing the standards - the men would be subject to a lower language competency level.. In 1984 the government restated their two-tier entrance requirement by saying: "in national interest" [the standards will be maintained] to prevent worsening of the lopsided reproduction pattern and the single graduate woman problem (*Straits Times* 31/10/83). The increase in local control of education reflected the state's desire to reduce global social influences as the PAP experienced a decline in popular vote.

Women and their education were now treated as less equal as the government changed its position on population control. In 1984, as the government changed the population policy, there was a curriculum shift in the education system. In the 1960s and 1970s, boys and girls were equally encouraged by the education system to take both technical courses and home economics.

---

<sup>40</sup> In 1979, Singapore embarked on a radical shift in employment and industrial priorities. The new policies were for an increase in technology, education and wages. This was in part due to the opening of more Southeast Asian nations to MNCs. Singapore's aim was to climb up one tier on the global economic hierarchy by becoming a middle ground between the industrialized nations and the other developing nations (Rodan 1989)

With this new view of women as reproducers in 1984, girls found that home economics was mandatory and they were denied access to technical courses and boys did not have the option of taking home economics (Wee 1987). According to the Minister of State for Education: “Girls should be girls” and trained for their future roles as wives, mothers, and workers (*Straits Times* 04/09/84).<sup>41</sup>

Since the introduction of streaming programs (as a result of the Goh Education Report, 1983) boys have outnumbered girls two to one in the gifted stream. This perpetuates the idea that women are not as good as men and in this way the education system of Singapore socially constructs gender roles. It is the institution for teaching the ‘norms’ of society (Agarwal 1988). The ‘norms’ or ideals for women have changed in the past thirty years, from an equal opportunity program to a gender biased policy. Women in the education system are taught the two most important roles in life: first, to be good wives and mothers and second, to be obedient workers. The education system is a one of the intersections of the global/local interface, here women are exposed to global information, but they are bound by the local images.

### **Roles and Images**

In the 1960s the women of Singapore were compared to their sisters in Japan and unlike the Japanese women, Singapore women “enjoy a high socio-economic status which is commensurate with the progressive image of Singapore as a modern city” (Low *et al.* 1993). In the late 1980s, women were once again compared to their Japanese counterparts, but this was in support of then Prime Minister Tanaka’s comment that the more Tanakas in Japan the more

---

<sup>41</sup> During my visit to Singapore I was able to meet with the SCWO and some teachers who were concerned with the policy of mandatory home economics in schools. The SCWO had lobbied the government for changes in the policy and suggested the introduction of a ‘life skills’ course for both boys and girls. Having received government assurances that this would-be implemented in 1994, I found in the course of our conversations that the government was postponing the introduction due to facility and technical problems.



dynamic the society, in support of the eugenics ideology. By the 1990s, Lee had changed his focus, educated career women were no longer equated with the modern, progressive city, and the Japanese system was Lee's preferred model:

“Lee, who is regarded as the father of modern Singapore, said he favored the Japanese system where many “attractive and intelligent young ladies went to finishing colleges where they learned modern languages and all the social graces which would make them marvelous helpers of their husbands career.” (Bramham 1994a:A12)

Despite the advances in the social landscape, women still cling to many traditional images. From a very early age, they are trained to be “gentle, pleasing and well versed in homemaking” (Lim 1993:109). The strong feminist movement from the West filtered down into Singapore media and society in the 1980s. Women's image in the media has changed from the docile housewife of the 1950s to the dynamic career woman, but there was a swing back to more images of women as domestic and maternal in the 1990s.

In this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nation, women's lives are still shaped by strong cultural factors. Within the strong patriarchal ethnic systems of Singapore, women are trained from birth to following the set roles and images of women (Lim 1993). The stereotypes of women are hard to shake, local advertising reinforces the images of the compliant daughter, mother and contented housewife (Siraj 1988).

### Dual and Triple Roles

Women are caught in a double bind of filling traditional roles and fulfilling new demands. As Singapore enters its “next lap”, it faces a gender dilemma, women are needed in the workplace due to the labour shortage, but if they work and have fewer children the shortage of workers will be exacerbated in the future (Koh and Wee 1987). Women are now encouraged to take on the multiple roles of work, marriage and motherhood (FEER 17/05/1990). Women

receive two contradictory social pressures, there is their primary duty to the home/family and their duty to work so they can contribute to integration of Singapore in the global economic system. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the majority of women worked when they were single (only 14% of married women were part of the labour force in 1957, this increased to 15% in 1970 and climbed dramatically by 1979 to 27%), stopping when they married as household, husband and parenting demands increased. But in a country of limited immigration and a declining birth rate in the 1980s and 1990s:

“Singapore faces an unfortunate dilemma. Higher employment among women will ease labour shortages for now but will exacerbate shortages in the future unless women can be successfully encouraged to take on the multiple responsibilities of work, marriage, and motherhood.” (FEER 17/05/90:52)

As Aline Wong put it: “every step of a working woman’s career, she has to reconcile her role conflicts, ..., the well known dilemma of home versus career” (1980:60). The rising expectations of many Singapore families commits more than one person to earning an income and as a result most women continue to juggle their many roles out of economic necessity (Salaff and Wong 1984, Quah 1993).

### Women and the Modern Household

As part of the ‘modernization’ efforts in the 1960s, the government embarked on a massive housing program (see Figure 4-2). The relocation of people from the crowded slums of the inner city and from the rural *kampongs* into the nuclear-family based, high-density, high-rise housing was part of the physical changes associated with the modernization of Singapore (Quah 1988). These new nuclear, class divided housing projects brought with them the global concept of nuclear family structure. This was distinct from the large kin or family based groupings that had been common in the previous city housing. For women this new arrangement had both positive and negative effects. The nuclear family household, freed young women from the influ





Figure 4-2: Typical HDB housing project in Singapore (Wong and Leong 1993a:29)



ence of kin members in the day to day running of the family. No longer under the constant gaze of a mother-in-law, many young women felt an increase in personal decision making and influence in the distribution of household income. However, there were negative effects associated with this housing type. The modern flats decreased women's access to kin members for childcare if they continued to work outside the home. These young women were now responsible for the upkeep of a three room flat and the maintenance of a home (with furnishings appropriate with their class). These chores would have been shared by a group of women in the traditional multi-nuclear households. The modern home was a source of status, and this led to an increase in consumer durables in the home. The addition of modern conveniences, often thought to reduce housework, have added more demands on women: first, they must earn the income to afford the goods and secondly, they must alter their skills and methods to adapt to the new items (such as the microwave). With the new freedoms of the nuclear family based living arrangements came increased responsibilities to care for the household and the family.

The change in household pattern was part of the modernization of Singapore and like many nations who are willing to embrace industrialization and the modernization of the physical landscape, the government of Singapore did not want to alter the social landscape. Government social policy was often in direct contradiction of their economic policy. As Goldberg states: "Singapore's level of industrialization requires women in the workforce, yet politicians also want to retain them in their traditional position at home" (1987:26). The pulls and pushes of traditional and modern roles are a part of the many social policies of the government, and are an integral part of the local aspect in the global/local dialectic. As an example of these tensions a closer look at marriage follows.

### Modern and Traditional Images of Women and Marriage

Marriage is an integral part of the definition of womanhood and femininity in Singapore.

The transition from the traditional arranged marriage to the global ideal of a free choice marriage has created changing views on femininity and women's roles. The traditional marriage was a legal arrangement for procreation (Quah 1988) and was organized by family/kin for the betterment of the group, via status, wealth or possible opportunities for the family (Wong 1976). The modern marriage was based more on personal choice, or perceived personal choice, and the love and companionship between two consenting adults (Quah 1988). The woman as an object or chattel used to seal a bargain between families has changed to a woman presenting herself as an object for marriage, this has added the modern concept of femininity and beauty to the marriage equation. The Western ideal partner and marriage are based on a personal choice by love and interest. Marriage between two people leads to the formation of a household independent of other family members. In Singapore, this is when young people are leaving their natal home<sup>42</sup> the control of the family is decreased upon marriage (although social conformity is still strong). The shifting marriage trends from the traditional towards modern arrangements creates an uncertainty amongst women, they are pulled in two directions; the desire to please the family and the wish to make personal decisions regarding marriage makes marriage one of the focal points of tension in Singapore social structure (Quah 1988, 1993, Lim 1993).

In the evolving modern marriage in Singapore, wives perceive of marriage as a mosaic (or collage) of values loosely held together by social pressures to conform (Quah 1988). The

---

<sup>42</sup> In an effort to maintain family households and prevent too many single person households, the HDB restricted the access of unmarried persons to public flats. As more young professionals were earning wages, they qualified by salary to purchase a HDB flat, but with the increase in emphasis on the family the HDB returned the applications and would not allow single persons applications. In 1992, the HDB finally opened some flats to single persons, provided they were over 35 years of age (at which time the state feels they are too old for children). (Quah 1993)

changing social values make life choices difficult. The mosaic of possibilities and the social pressures of the 1980s and 1990s create a conflict of 'preferred' social roles for women. How women deal with these conflicting roles in and out of marriage can be seen in the compromise and compliance to these social pressures.

The marriage partner in the personal choice marriage for most women represents a woman's desire for social mobility and security. Women are still defined more by their partner's occupation and position than their own (Safilios-Rothschild 1982). In the emerging modern marriage trends, there is an emerging individualism. The postponement of marriage and the delaying of children are often a result of these tendencies, as young people feel the need to develop as individuals before marriage. They believe that both men and women should complete their education and work for financial security, as well as become more mature before marrying (Quah 1988, 1993, Wong and Leong 1993). The rising average age of marriage is an indicator of this changing attitude to individual development. The majority of women surveyed in 1986 (Quah 1988), in response to why they delayed marriage and/or children, responded that they wanted to 'enjoy' their marriage. The personal satisfaction desired from marriage is part of the modern romantic outlook which is becoming more common as marriage in Singapore modernizes. Culture and traditions can do little to stop the trends of later marriage and fewer children, which is common to most 'modernizing societies' as a result of industrialization (Quah 1988). The re-emergence of the state's rhetoric on traditional values and families has occurred only in the past ten years, re-creating tensions for women with the conflict between traditional and modern. In her survey on marriage and child-bearing, Quah (1988) found that women "find themselves between two important but opposite worlds with unclear signposts, because of

changing values on marriage, family life and self-fulfillment” (40). Women in Singapore are caught between two worlds (Quah 1988), traditional and modern.

### **Conclusion**

The social landscape through which the women of Singapore must traverse is full of hills and valleys as the government has shifted policies within one generation. The tensions are created through these “mixed messages” (Goldberg 1987) and the division of within society forms multiple roles for each woman to enact. This chapter has shown the tangled web of pressures that influence identity in the Singapore society for women. The use of cosmetics to formulate a strategy of survival in this landscape is but one method of dealing with modernization in Singapore. The role of beauty and femininity in the social landscape has increased as women are re-directed to the domestic sphere, with the family and children as their primary focus.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Cosmetics Industry in Singapore**

#### **Image Making**

“A woman working all day making microchips who buys lipstick is buying some tiny sense of dignity and self-esteem along with the glamour.” (Chapkis 1986:38)

The lipstick, one of the most accessible cosmetics world wide, has become a portable expression of the feminine soul and an emblem of the American way of life in Southeast Asia (Chapkis 1986). The beauty trade renewed its global market push when multi-national corporations (MNC) used beauty contests and fashion shows to increase the feminine aspects of the electronic assembly work. The MNCs promoted the consumption habits of their employees in order to teach them the ‘modern’ way of life (Grossman 1979, Yeo 1980, Lim 1982). The cosmetics industry is a part of the global culture of mass consumption and the new international division of labour (NIDL) discussed in Chapter 2.

Women employ the ideology of femininity and beauty (and the cosmetics ritual) to find their identity in the global/local interface. The cosmetics industry represents the global images of feminine for women while the use of cosmetics in a grooming ritual preserves the state’s ‘feminine’ images. The cosmetics industry has attempted to shift its focus as women have altered their image to match the global and local climates for femininity. This chapter is concerned with the development and expansion of the cosmetics industry in Singapore and its effects on women’s perception of beauty and identity. The first section of this chapter focuses on the global expansion of the cosmetics industry. The second section explores the history of the cosmetics industry in Singapore and the growth of the industry in the 1980s as Singapore



developed towards a middle class society. The third section deals with a selection of companies which were investigated, who market different images to women in Singapore. The fourth section explores on a more personal and in-depth level the women who sell (and buy) cosmetics, and relates this to social class and mobility in Singapore. The final section shows the importance of advertising in the creation of images of women and beauty in the social climate of Singapore.

### Globalization of Cosmetics

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the wave of capital expansion and the movement of labour-intensive manufactures off shore was followed by a smaller wave that was no less important - the wave of new lifestyles and products through the multinational corporations and mass media. The cosmetics industry was a part of this second wave. The rapid increase in the female labour force participation in Singapore and other industrializing economies, created a new market - single women with personal disposable income (see Figure 5-1). Women with wages were enticed to purchase the new symbols of the capital economy to which their work was linked. Through the promotion of beauty contests and make-up application courses, the multinational corporations were able to promote the concepts of femininity in the workplace - passivity, submissive behavior, & the perception that physical appearance is important (Yeo 1980). Gender and development literature of the 1970s focused on the emerging working woman living in the developing economies. In an article on "Women's Place in the Integrated Circuit", Rachel Grossman (1979) discusses both the electronics industry, into which women have been newly integrated, and the integration of the global images of women, beauty and femininity by these young women:

"Elaborate make-up is part of the electronics image in Malaysia, and the factories even provide classes in how to apply it. All this allows the worker to feel they are part of a global culture which includes the choice between Avon and Mary Quant products." (1979:13)



Figure 5-1: Global Cosmetics & Media: Elle, Lancome poster and a Singapore Woman. (Lim 1993:109)

“The stress on foreign images of femininity foster the illusion that consuming Western products makes a woman part of an international culture.” (1979:16)

The young women interviewed for this article cited two main reasons for working in the electronics factories: money and freedom (Grossman 1979). The decision making in the purchase of personal use items such as cosmetics showed the increased individual power of these women within the evolving social landscape of Southeast Asia<sup>43</sup>. In Singapore women had been exposed to the use of cosmetics through the British colonial experience in the first half of the Twentieth century, but use by the majority of the female population was economically restrictive until the 1970s and the economic boom in Singapore. The majority of women, in the 1930s through the 1960s, were too busy managing everyday life to be concerned with the global images of beauty. In the 1970s with the entry of Singapore into the global manufacturing circuit, there was an increased awareness by women of the global images of femininity and of women's role in the global beauty culture. As women's participation in the labour force has increased over the past thirty-five years, so has the cosmetics industry expanded to meet the increasing demands of women for their products. The affluence of Singapore and the dramatic changing social and economic roles for women has led to multi-faceted images of women and beauty. The social conservativeness of Singapore is juxtaposed with the imported, global images of beauty. These conflicting images of the global and the local are seen as the industry maneuvers a tight-rope balancing act between the Global/ Modern and the Local/ Traditional in its promotion and advertising campaigns. The local/global dialectic is played out as the local image of women is changed and constrained by the global beauty and feminine images, through the cosmetics industry and its promotion.

---

<sup>43</sup> The autonomy of women wage earners has been thoroughly researched by Wolf 1993, Lim 1983, Salaff and Wong 1984, Blumberg 1988, and Ong 1987b. But the control of income does not remove women from the social pressures of conformity.

### **Cosmetics Industry and Singapore**

Make-up is a daily ritual for many women in Singapore, almost second nature. While beauty may be only skin deep, according to Singapore Business Magazine, women's desire for beauty has created an industry worth billions world wide (Cua 1988). Cosmetics sales and the images of the global woman began in the 1970s as part of the modernization of Singapore and this has blossomed into a multi-million dollar industry. According to the *Retailer* business magazine (1986:4) Singapore women "slosh on millions of dollars of beauty products" each year. These women appear to be sold on the idea that beauty has become part of their personality and cosmetics, as part of the beauty ritual, assumes an important role in women's identity. The majority of cosmetics imported are destined for Orchard Road shopping centres, where thousands of women flock to purchase the latest shade of lipstick or wrinkle curing potion. The recession of 1985 showed a slight decline in volume of imports, but from 1986 on there has been a continuous climb in the imports. According to Mary Kay Ash (1986), cosmetics are depression/recession proof industries - when times are bad a woman cannot afford a new dress but can afford a new lipstick.

Singapore has been a focus of the global cosmetics firms for almost twenty years and it is now gaining a role as the regional distribution centre for many companies. Singapore, as the most affluent and accessible of ASEAN nations, has experienced a change in product focus, the brands available, and improved quality of goods. The lower end merchandise, such as Mabeline or Avon, is now being used by guest workers or exported to the ASEAN region. French cosmetics imports were one half of Japan's and equal to the United States in 1980 but, by 1992, French imports were triple the US and over four times Japan's imports (See Table 5-1).

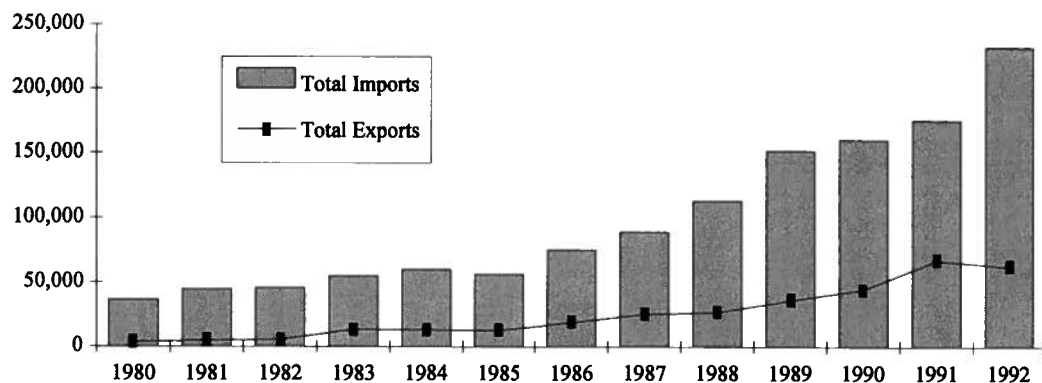
**Table 5-1**  
**Cosmetics Imports, Total and By selected Country, In million Singapore \$'s,**  
**For the Years 1980-1992**

Year	Total	France	United States	Japan	United Kingdom
1980	36.3	5.7	5.4	10.0	5.2
1981	44.4	6.1	6.9	15.0	2.5
1982	45.5	7.2	8.4	16.2	3.6
1983	54.9	8.6	10.0	17.8	4.7
1984	59.7	9.2	10.0	17.0	5.2
1985	56.0	11.0	10.2	13.3	6.0
1986	75.0	16.6	11.8	17.0	8.0
1987	88.9	21.0	15.2	15.8	11.3
1988	112.9	31.7	15.8	18.2	13.7
1989	151.4	50.0	19.7	22.3	12.9
1990	160.3	52.0	21.0	21.6	15.2
1991	175.6	55.9	22.9	24.0	14.6
1992	232.9	95.4	33.8	21.3	14.3

Source: *Singapore Trade Statistics*, 1980 - 1992, Singapore Trade Development Board

The dominance of the French firms began in 1986 and account for much of the rise in import figures (See Figure 5-2).

**Figure 5-2**  
**Skin Care and Colours, Import and Export Figures,**  
**1980-1992, In Thousand S\$**



Source: same as Table 5-1

In 1990, over three hundred million Singapore dollars were spent on cosmetics. One half of these were mass produced lines such as Mabeline, Avon or Cover Girl, and the other half were

‘up market’ brands such as Clinique, Estee Lauder or Shiseido (SBC 1991). The inexpensive drugstore brands and the exclusive ‘up market’ brands often contain almost the same ingredients but the marketing and packaging can change the price by as much as 1,000 percent. The high priced cosmetics contains the image of global modernity as part of the cost.

The cosmetics retail industry in Singapore relies on the tourist market, with Japanese women being the highest purchasers of Japanese made cosmetics (cheaper in Singapore than in Japan). The tourist’s purchases totaled over \$170 million dollars in 1990, well over half of the total sales. The remaining \$130 million was spent by Singapore women (who number 800,000 between the ages of 20 and 60 (Lau 1992a)). With the weakening of the Japanese tourist market, the industry has turned its’ promotional sales towards the local market. Competition for market share is tight, with more gifts with purchase and free make-overs, but for Singapore women in the 1990s looks count more than ever and the industry expects merely a leveling in sales as the tourist market declines (EC 1993). Advertising of cosmetics, while still presenting global applications, is promoting more ethnic diversity to address the increasingly tight market. The promotion of cosmetics is also moving into the high schools (BT 1993). As the cosmetics market tightens, there is a move to younger and younger clients and this supports the government’s appeal for girls to be girls in the education system.

#### Who uses what

The integration of Singapore women into the modern cosmetics grooming rituals was not done with generic methods. There are cosmetics for each and every age group, for career women, for working class to upper class matrons (BT 1993). The diffusion of cosmetic types and applications was first by example, seeing another woman apply a colour or a style. But with the increase number of women’s magazines and television shows directed at women, a whole

new penetration of global beauty ensued. The correct shades of lipstick, nail polish, or blush now change four or more times per year as cosmetics, and their application, have a very short consumer life span.<sup>44</sup> Young women apply cosmetics to look older, older women use them to look younger, and women in the middle use them to preserve their fresh look. There appears to be a correlation between the increase in women in the labour force and the rising volume of imported cosmetics. As shown in Table 5-2, there is a dramatic rise in the volume of cosmetics as LFP rates increased. The higher rate increases are found in the older age cohort (from 46% to 65%), where there is probably a higher use of cosmetics (the work place is one arena where youth and beauty are assets).

**Table 5-2**  
**Female LFP Rates and Total Cosmetics Imports, Selected ages and years**

Year	Labour Force Participation Rates			Total Cosmetics Imports
	20-24	25-29	30-34	
1982	79.4	62.6	46.7	45.5
1989	81.3	74.1	59.8	151.4
1990	79.6	76.3	63.0	160.3
1991	82.6	75.6	61.9	175.6
1992	80.2	77.8	64.7	232.9

Source: Dept of Statistics (1993) *Yearbook of Statistics Singapore 1992*,  
Singapore: National Printers; same as Table 5-1.

Cosmetics have created a niche in women's grooming rituals that crosses class and age boundaries, no matter who uses the products, one thing remains: women who use cosmetics feel that it is a vital part of their personality and identity in the society.

---

<sup>44</sup> Cosmetics have a shelf life of around one year after which the ingredients begin to break down. The life span of a cosmetic is much shorter as it is part of the larger fashion industry, where 3 to 4 months is long time for colours to remain. Another aspect of the short consumer life is the disposable nature of cosmetics, the high use women (usually young ) apply and re-apply cosmetics over the course of a day thus using up the product and the image at a high rate.

“A career woman said, ‘Wearing makeup helps me to switch gears as I leave the house. It feels good to wear makeup.’ Another explains, ‘Once you get used to wearing makeup, you don’t feel at ease without it. Using makeup becomes a habit.’ Makeup, along with their style of clothes, helps them present a facade to the outside world: ‘If I don’t wear makeup, my face just doesn’t look the right color, and no matter what I wear I don’t look attractive.’” (Bartos 1989:189)

The use of makeup as a mask or as an expression of inner self speaks to the multiple roles women feel the need to play. By separating the applications of cosmetics to one or two of their roles, women are able to physically compartmentalize their life. The division of life helps women feel more in control of who they are and how they are perceived. The creation of the correct look for each situation is important to women no matter what their socio-economic level or their employment level (PC).

#### Changing Faces

The focus of cosmetics has shifted from a predominantly fragrance-and-colours industry to one where skin care and specialty lines are the money makers according to one cosmetics industry executive (PC). After 25 years in the business he has seen this shift from generic perfumes and basic blue eye shadow to new cosmetics with new segments of the population to use them. There are currently lines for women of all ages. What is now appearing are lines for men and children, even a new perfume for babies, which shows the affluence of the young parents in Singapore in the 1990s (ET 1993).

The amount of cosmetics used will depend on whether or not the woman is going to work, to shop, or out for an evening (Bartos 1989). The introduction of more high end skin care products creates a market that doesn’t depend on a woman’s activities for purchase, but they do depend on the 1990s appeal for youthful appearance. As baby boomers enter their 40s, the changing demographics have caused a change in cosmetics focus to anti-aging products with an almost clinical, medical approach as has happened in the industrialized nations.



### The Many Faces of the Industry

Cosmetics in Singapore are sold by many different means. There are door-to-door sales, office parties and 'makeover' shows, the local drugstore pegboard, the fancy counter at Tang's on Orchard Road, independent store fronts and private beauty clinics. In this section, four companies will be discussed representing different global firms and different methods of sales. In all of the companies there is a dominance of women as sellers and buyers of beauty.

#### "Ding, dong, Avon calling ...."

A phrase known the world over, needing no further explanation, the Avon Cosmetics Corporation has become an international business selling from one woman to another for generations. Avon is the cosmetics firm who made door-to-door selling a trademark. As part of the global cosmetics industry Avon, has spread throughout the world, into Russia, the Amazon, and China. Avon is a lower end, inexpensive line of cosmetics which appeals to women on limited income or with limited access to other cosmetics (such as women who live in rural areas with little or no cash income). In Singapore, Avon has been on the local scene for over 10 years, with expansion into other Southeast Asian nations in the last 5 years. The technique of using unemployed housewives to sell cosmetics to their friends and neighbours was a successful marketing and sales approach for decades in North America, but in Singapore this method has not been as successful. Singaporeans are reluctant to let strangers into their homes as they fear they could be robbed and this has limited the usual approach by Avon sales representatives (AT 1993). The Avon corporation was late in realizing that the working woman phenomena was a permanent position for the majority of young women in Singapore (Kleinfield 1986). The sales representatives had to market their products in the workplace, where cosmetics use was higher. The competition for cosmetics users was high in this area as Mary Kay focuses on this niche.

The other segment of the population who make up many of Avon's customers are the foreign workers who are employed as maids and nannies (AT 1993), on their day off these women congregate in parks and shopping areas, there they make a little extra money by selling cosmetics to their friends. The lack of permanent dependable, sales representatives is another reason why Avon is less successful than other cosmetics brands (AT 1993). The use of Avon products by the maids and nannies reflects the social divisions of women in Singapore, if the cosmetics are used by their employees, the middle class women will not use the product (P.Ong 1993).

### Mary Kay

Mary Kay is a growing cosmetics industry in Singapore. This firm has a philosophy attached to each and every pale pink cosmetics package. The founder and owner, Mary Kay Ash, developed the company to give women the opportunity to earn a living, doing what they were experts at - applying cosmetics. The basic philosophy of Mary Kay is "God first, Family second, Work third" (BT 1993). This appeals to the growing Christian community in Singapore,<sup>45</sup> and it upholds the local feminine identity as the family nurturer, with work as the least important. Another aspect of the Mary Kay 'ethic' is that men "respect" women who retain their femininity and they respond more favorably to her if she presents an attractive appearance:

"He (God) made us feminine for a reason, and we should always strive to maintain our femininity" (Ash 1986:113)

Mary Kay is in the business of helping women look more feminine and beautiful, the beauty consultants are not permitted to wear slacks (the dress code requires the consultants to wear skirts) and, of course, they must be well groomed (Ash 1986). This dress code supports the

---

<sup>45</sup> Christianity was the only religion to register and increase between 1980 and 1990, increasing from 10% to 13% of the population. The marketing survey by Kau and Yang (1991) indicated that the youth had shifted to Christianity from Buddhism and Taoism by 30% (of those who responded to the question).

current government appeal to women to look feminine (to promote identification of 'looks' with marriage) and repeats the dress code found in many Singapore offices for acceptable female attire in the workplace (P. Ong 1993).

The development of sales in this corporation is based on women recruiting other women to sell the cosmetics and through beauty parties, selling cosmetics using the skills developed over years of applying cosmetics. Mary Kay believes that women working outside the home are more interesting, better wives, better parents and better members of the community (Ash 1986). This parallels the promotion of women as wives, mothers and workers by the government.

In Singapore the local franchise for Mary Kay cosmetics is held by a man, who has the distribution rights to Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. This is unusual for Mary Kay, as women are the majority of directors in North America, but the company was new to the area and Mary Kay (US) felt using a local distributor who upheld the company philosophy, and understood the cultural variations of business, was more important than gender. All of the remaining beauty consultants and directors in Singapore are women. The basic philosophy of Mary Kay is promoted by this distributor, the first consideration and comment regarding a consultant was "she's a good Christian" (BT 1993). The remaining comments reiterated the Mary Kay philosophy of God first, her family second and work third.

The main products that are promoted in Singapore are skin care as opposed to make-up coloured items. Marketers have found that there is little brand loyalty in colour cosmetics, skin care is where the money can be made, once a woman finds one product line for her skin, she remains loyal to the brand (*Retailer* 1987). This focus on skin care versus colours, also represents the difference in the clientele of Mary Kay and Avon. Mary Kay has slightly older clients, the majority of whom work, who are concerned with looking 'young and natural' and

have proportionately higher disposable income. The biggest selling item of the Mary Kay cosmetics line is the basic skin-care starter kit (designed for individual skin types) which retails for \$200S (BM 1993). The high cost of skin care products and the slightly older client base shows the divisions amongst female cosmetics users in Singapore, where income and age divides women within society as well.

The local housing situation presents a challenge to Mary Kay who, like Avon, use in home selling in North America. The local distributor has created a business office which doubles as a 'home make over' centre. The beauty consultants are able to use the centre for beauty parties, and as this is also the distribution centre, they can sell, collect the money and distribute the product all in one evening. In this way Mary Kay products have adapted to the local climate. Women can get out of their small flats for an evening with other women in an air conditioned room, designed for the application of cosmetics. Another local feature of the marketing of Mary Kay cosmetics is in promotion and advertising. In North America the main advertising and marketing methods are by word of mouth or through a friend's invitations to a 'beauty party'. In Singapore, the local distributor has developed a more aggressive marketing method. Promotional flyers are sent to offices, hotels, secretary colleges and hospitals, with offers of free make overs and demonstrations. Through these flyers, Mary Kay representatives are able to sell their cosmetics in many locations other than the private home. This realization, that the Singapore market is very different from the North American market, has contributed to the success of these cosmetics.

#### Lancome and other French firms

Lancome, one of the many lines of French cosmetics, is marketed in Singapore through the distribution centre Cosmetics de France. The company has been in Singapore since 1980 and

has experienced a continual growth in sales until 1993, when sales leveled off. The success of the French cosmetics houses in Singapore was shown in the dramatic increase in market share over the past ten years (see Table 5-1). These cosmetics are marketed in the Orchard Road shopping centres, where cosmetics counter and advertisements comprise most of the main floors. The use of the international advertising by the French cosmetics firms, reinforces the global nature of the industry. European women are used to promote these cosmetics therefore, the appeal is exotic in Singapore. Isabella Rossallini (see Figure 5-1, the poster in background) promotes this European image and lifestyle in the Lancome advertising and personal appearances, but is this image attainable by Singapore women? (SBC 1991) The global ideals of women and the local traditional ideals often conflict in the marketing of cosmetics in Singapore. The acceptance of cosmetics as part of a woman's daily ritual, no matter what the economic circumstances, is emphasized by one executive: "cosmetics take up just a small part of one's disposable income. Women want to look and smell good even during a recession" (Cua 1988:9).

French cosmetics are not reliant on the Japanese tourist dollar and are not as affected by the recent decline in Japanese purchases in 1992. The French cosmetics' main focus in marketing was to the upper class women, but there has been some shift to middle class as recession affects business. There has been an increase in gift-with-purchase (GWP) and free make overs, as gimmicks, to attract market share in 1992 and 1993 (P. Chong 1993). The increasing affluence of the middle class in Singapore also accounts for the shift in focus by these firms. The shifting demographics of the client base in Singapore has opened up the market to more differentiated sales promotion. The 1980s marketing push by the French firms was anti-aging, with Estee Lauder cornering one third of the luxury cosmetics market in Singapore in 1988. In 1992 the latest promotion is Prescriptive from Estee Lauder, custom made make-up.

This product is mixed and blended for each individual to match their colouring. The appeal of this product is in the recognition of skin tones not in the global line previously (skin tones were based on European colours) (SBC 1991). The growing Asian market has caused some of the changes in product line for the French cosmetics houses, and the affluence in Singapore makes it a prominent location for marketing the higher end cosmetics.

### The Body Shop

Another approach to the marketing of cosmetics by global companies is done by The Body Shop. These independent store fronts and their products have, like Mary Kay, a philosophy attached. The social value woven into the cosmetics and skin care items, is drawn from the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Values such as trade not aid, reuse and recycle, no advertising, and no fancy bottles or packaging are part of each store's operation. The franchise in Singapore is part of a larger enterprise which has the franchise for East and West Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan and Korea. From the headquarters in Singapore, The Body Shop is expanding to the other countries within their franchise. The first Body Shop opened in 1983 as a counter sales in the Centre Point shopping mall on Orchard Road, and by the end of 1993 there were 13 independent Body Shop outlets throughout the island. The appeal of The Body Shop, to Singapore shoppers, is in its' youthful, natural outlook. It is a young company, employing young workers, and has reputation for social responsibility. This youthful atmosphere is also reflected in the clientele of the shops, fifty percent are women between the ages of 25 and 35, with twenty percent between 15 and 20, and twenty percent from 35 to 45 (BH 1993).

Promotions are done through activities in the community, such as Project Paperchase (the company was the first in Singapore to use only recycled paper and environmentally friendly

bags) and the donation of 10% of bottle refills to the purchase of orchids as part of the 'Make Singapore a Fragrant City' campaign (SL 1993). Due to the political atmosphere in Singapore, The Body Shop must be cautious and plays a low-key role in the community. They try to work within the cultural /political system, where they are unable to support some of the global projects of The Body Shop, such as Amnesty International (which is banned in Singapore) (BH 1993).

The Body Shop is an interesting change in the global cosmetics industry; the youthful appeal, the social conscious, and the environmental values sets the company apart from the major cosmetics firms. The company does not promote any images of "perfect women that might make the customer feel inadequate and driven to seek perfection through cosmetics" (*Straits Times* 24/06/1993). This non-imaging of women is unique in the international cosmetics industry, The Body Shop would rather focus on the good feelings women get from taking care of themselves and the world through social conscious. In this way the company appeals to the young, affluent and well educated Singaporeans and upholds the government's appeal to the citizens of Singapore to be more involved in their community.

#### Women Who Sell Cosmetics

Women sell cosmetics to other women. Cosmetics and their application is an area of expertise for women. But the majority of women work in the cosmetics industry out of an economic reality - they need a wage to maintain their family. On Orchard Road, in all the major malls, women will be found selling cosmetics from fancy counters that display products from the far corners of the globe. The international appeal of cosmetics can be seen in the similarity these counters have throughout the world. The black designs of Chanel and the pale green of Clinique are ubiquitous symbols of the global nature of the cosmetics industry. Behind these counters are young women elegantly made-up with the latest in colours and style. Many of the sales women

are on salary but some of the larger cosmetics firms hire their own staff and pay commissions, fostering a strong competitive attitude between women on the cosmetics floor. The salaried clerks are the exact opposite of the commissioned clerks, they spend more time applying and purchasing cosmetics than selling. The art of selling cosmetics is dependent upon women feeling the need to change what she looks like and who she is. The sales clerks must create a need in each customer without making the woman feel 'beyond repair'.

The different firms used in this case study have different methods of selling beauty, but all of them use young women as their front line sellers. The majority of these sales representatives work out of economic need but selling cosmetics is also an area of social communication for women. The expertise and social spheres of the cosmetics industry can be seen in the ways in which cosmetics are marketed in Singapore.

A beauty consultant was interviewed, by this researcher, to understand on the personal level why a woman sells cosmetics and how this affects her life. This beauty consultant, Beth M., works for herself as an independent retailer of Mary Kay cosmetics. This means that she is able to market the products and retain a percentage of her sales. The availability of prizes and trips are an incentive to many of the sales representatives and Beth is no exception. During the interview she disclosed that she is going to Texas to meet Mary Kay as the top sales beauty consultant for Singapore. This type of reward for hard work matches the work ethic promoted in Singapore, where productivity and quality of work have been pushed as part of the reasons for global investment in Singapore. The financial rewards for selling Mary Kay cosmetics is shown in the salaries of the beauty consultants: in 1985, there were 150,000 women selling Mary Kay cosmetics and the company had more women earning over \$50,000 than any other company in America (Ash 1986V).



Beth is in her mid-forties and was part of the first group of women who were encouraged to work full time and have small families. She left school in 1966, worked full time until her marriage in 1973, had her daughter in 1975 and returned to work shortly after. During the 1970s, this was the ideal pattern for women according to the government and the social climate of Singapore. These women feel the conflicts of changing government policy for women. They had small families but hear their daughters being encouraged to marry earlier and have more children. Beth is also part of the first group to truly benefit from the enforced savings of the CPF and expanded education opportunities. The baby boomers of Singapore are the largest market and the most financially able to pursue the ideal of owning a terrace home, rather than a HDB flat and as such, Beth's family represent an ideal middle class family of Singapore.

Beth has been with Mary Kay for four years, almost since the introduction of the cosmetics to Singapore. Beth was working as a secretary for an American firm close by (they pay better than Singapore firms according to Beth), when a friend suggested she go for a free facial from a beauty consultant. After trying the products she decided she could sell these products to her family and make enough to cover the cost of cosmetics for her personal use ( this beauty consultant has a mother, six sisters, a daughter and a mother-in-law who all use cosmetics). Over time Beth found that she could make more in one evening selling Mary Kay than she did in one week as a full time secretary. As a result Beth went to part time work as a secretary and increased the time she spent on Mary Kay. Beth's husband was not certain that he wanted her to sell Mary Kay, but when the money came in and she believed in the products, he was very supportive of her choice. Beth reports that her daughter is her biggest supporter who encourages her to strive for excellence.

Beth wants to keep her part time position as a secretary because of the benefits she receives from being an employee. Her CPF benefits are used to pay for the corner terrace house they have recently purchased. Beth's husband works full time for a government agency and this together with Beth's income allows them to enjoy life in Singapore. Beth has a maid and her mother-in-law living with them. This means that Beth does very little around the house in the way of domestic chores. She indicated that most often she and her husband will go out for dinner after work and return to find the house work done for them. Beth's most important focus at the moment, in the home, is tutoring her daughter for her college entrance exams (coming in November 1993), this job is crucial for Beth and it represents the desire for social mobility through education that is a goal for most Singapore parents.

Beth embodies the Mary Kay philosophy; she is a Christian and her family comes before her work. Supporting the basic philosophy also entails the acceptance of the correct positioning of beauty consultants as women. The beauty consultants in Singapore are requested to follow the Mary Kay dress code: be well groomed, (hair, nails, and make-up), wear a skirt and to wear the pink jacket if possible. This feminine position of the beauty consultants reinforces the connection of cosmetics with femininity for women in Singapore. Sales women are able to maintain their image as feminine and domestic when they sell cosmetics, reinforcing these images to their clients. The image of women is not complete without 'putting their face on'. The dichotomy of the liberated working woman and the feminine, nurturing mother are negotiated by Beth in her attempts to resolve what the 'ideal' woman is in the current social landscape of Singapore.

Beth, as the top seller, is an aggressive marketer. She promotes Mary Kay throughout the community. Mary Kay solicits hotels, secretary colleges, offices, schools, and hospitals offering

free facials and demonstrations. The first step is a telephone call, the second a written invitation, and finally promotional flyers featuring the current gifts with purchases are sent. After a beauty consultation there is intensive follow-up. Beth finds that you have to devote a lot of time to maintenance of customers to keep your clientele. The majority of Beth's customers are between the ages of 21 and 50, most of whom work full-time. This means that Beth holds her demonstrations in offices, hotel rooms or in the office demonstration centre in the evenings or on the weekends.. In the past four years Beth has done only two home parties, which are the mainstay of the North American beauty consultant. The home in Singapore, according to Beth, is not conducive to sales and most women do not have the time to arrange home parties.

Beth enjoys the extras that are available to her through Mary Kay. Her retention of the secretarial position maintains her link to CPF and other benefits from a steady job, but Mary Kay allows her to improve the family's standard of living through personal initiative. Mary Kay offers the freedom of setting her own hours and deciding how hard she works, but it is also more challenging because you are responsible for your income level. There are lots of incentives offered by the distributor, like trips, jewelry, and cars, for those who work hard, including the all expense paid trip to Texas which Beth is taking. The entrepreneurship of this woman is part of the freedom women are able to enjoy when they control their income. Beth is able to make decisions about how much she works and when, as well as what happens to the money she earns. Beth combines the best of both worlds, the secure government benefit job and the elastic personal business of selling cosmetics. Beth hopes in a few years to be able to quit her job as a secretary and concentrate of selling cosmetics, she feels that there is more opportunity for her in cosmetics, and her house will be paid off by then.

Women selling cosmetics are the experts in this field. Men may be the general managers but women are the front line and are able to display their expertise to other women. The facts that they can make a good living from selling cosmetics ( in Beth's case up to 40% of the retail price) and gain in personal recognition through the companies are two strong reasons why women support the cosmetics trade. The self-esteem gained by being an independent income earner is one of the positive effects for women working in the cosmetics industry. Beth feels able to express herself as an individual who earns her own living and she places her concern for her family, and their position in society, as a part of her role as a woman. The juxtaposition of individual and group identity is part of the negotiations which Beth must traverse in her daily life as woman, entrepreneur, wife, mother and member of Singapore society.

Beth is but one example of how women view the cosmetics industry and cosmetics. As an area in which Beth can express her perception of what is feminine and womanly, she shows how every woman needs to reflect upon her positioning in society and business. The opportunities for women to excel in both the public and private spheres are limited in Singapore, and many other places on the globe. The cosmetics industry offers an opportunity in both spheres but it is also a restriction on women's skills as an entrepreneur when women feel that they can succeed only when they pursue 'pink collar' roles in the public sphere. Women can succeed in business but for many this means only in preconceived roles of femininity.

### **Marketing Femininity**

The cosmetics industry does not use their sales representatives as the only way to represent femininity using cosmetics. The media is the major means of distribution of the ideal female image, where the feminine takes on a whole new meaning. The mass media, according to the Consumer's Association of Penang, is "one of the most important tools in the so-called

modernization process” (1982:1). The global culture of mass consumption is demonstrated to be a one way communication for the majority of women in the developing nations, which tends to homogenize consumers and their identities thorough stereotypical images of women (CAP 1982).

### Cosmetics Advertising

Cosmetics are a part of the global consumer culture (discussed in Chapter 2). These products are not offered alone; they come with a social context. The beauty myth and the connection with femininity are combined in the cosmetics. One of the goals of cosmetics advertisements is to: “teach Singaporean women to see themselves as things to be painted and sculpted with cosmetics aids and to see themselves as competing with other women for male attention” (Siraj 1981:77). Cosmetics advertising uses the male ‘gaze’ to encourage a romantic ideal of a woman’s appearance. These advertisements teach women to be ornamental, like the Singapore Girl of the Singapore Airline advertisements (see Figures 1-1). The cosmetics advertisements,

“reinforce stereotyped images of women as vain and seductive, as sex objects, as emotionally, intellectually and physically dependent, as dull witted, passive insecure and in constant need of approval.” (CAP 1986)

These images are part of the desired local images of women as dependent but much advertisement in the past twenty years has been directed a growing segment of the female population, the career woman (PC). The new state driven maternal role for women has projected the importance of beauty and femininity in the workplace. Cosmetics, and the beauty myth and feminine ideals symbolized by them, are a way women can present herself in any one of her multiple roles society has defined for her.

It is only in the past 60 years that the pursuit of beauty has been available to the global population. Before the 1940s, cosmetics and the perceived beauty from them, were the property of the elites, today through the mass media and marketing, these images are available to all. The cosmetics industry and their advertising has become increasingly diverse and segmented by age, lifestyle and ability to pay. Cosmetics advertising has seen a shift in the past decade, from the dress for success assertive woman executive to a new approach arguing that women do not have to try to be 'men' through their appearance; women should be confident to play by their own rules - to be feminine in the business world (*Straits Times* 13/05/1993). This change in attitude pushed by the cosmetics firms through their advertisements, reinforces the backlash spoken of by Susan Faludi (1992). When women's use of cosmetics declined in the 1970s, the marketing departments of the global cosmetics firms were determined to re-assert their products through a softer image of the ideal super woman. This global image of a more feminine woman corresponded to the Singapore government's emphasis on women and their role in the 1980s and 1990s.

Cosmetics advertisements play on the importance of physical beauty, individualism and independence as it is expressed through clothing and cosmetics. It is not the cosmetic chemicals but the "seductive charms promised by the alluring symbols" (Yeo 1980:36) that appeals to women. The advertising of cosmetics depends upon women 'needing' the products. As one advertising executive put it: "It is our job to make women unhappy with what they have" (Moc 1977). Advertisers work at creating an insecure consumer, it doesn't matter what a woman looks like, as long as she feels ugly (Wolf 1991). The use of beautiful women and a luxurious lifestyle to sell cosmetics makes ordinary women feel that they don't 'measure up' to the beauty standards and in this way they are enticed to purchase the products. Women yearn to be just like the

beautiful woman in the advertisement and believe that if they purchase the product they too will look, and live, like the model (CAP 1986). The constant changes being made to the beauty image means that there is a continuing demand for the beauty products.

### **Conclusion**

Cosmetics firms are part of the multinational corporations that expanded into the developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s. The global nature of these companies is reinforced by the global message that they bring with them which is symbolized in their products. The spread of cosmetics was assisted by the feminine images being portrayed by countries such as Singapore to attract foreign investment. The Asian Woman was the ideal docile labourer, whose femininity was displayed through the beauty contests and make-up classes in the factories. These corporations depend on the continuing use of their products throughout the globe. As the market place opened in the Asian nations, the corporations employ the mass media to transmit the desired beauty images. The messages received by women in Singapore are the same the world over - cosmetics are a necessity, and are needed to express self, lifestyle, and to create images appropriate to social roles.

The increase in cosmetics consumption in the past ten years in Singapore is part of the global consumer culture to which the city-state is linked. The promotion of women as feminine in the media and the exposure to Western images of women has led to an increase in the perceived need of cosmetics in daily life. The desire to be modern and the availability of cosmetics to all income levels and age groups makes them an accepted part of the consumer culture. Women who sell cosmetics are integrated in the beauty business as users, promoters and sellers. The continuation of women's desire to improve their facial appearance is key to their own financial success.

## **Chapter Six**

### **More than just a Pretty Face**

#### **The Face**

“Our face is our greatest ambassador; nakedly it confronts the world.” (Liggett and Liggett 1989:175)

Why are we so concerned with facial appearance? Because facial information is usually the first way that other people can perceive who we are and facial appearance is continuously available during social interactions (Bull and Rumsey 1988). The face is part of our social skin and the physical representation of the self. The body is “the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted” (Turner 1993:15). By viewing the face as part of the social construction of self, we can see how women use cosmetics to define and adapt to the roles portrayed in society. The intersection of the self and cosmetics is on the face, and the currency of beauty in society is a reflection of the value of the face. The face can be a mirror, or a mask, as women negotiate their roles in society. As a mirror the face is thought to reflect the inner self, as a mask the face hides the self, removing the private person and presenting the public person. The mask is a culturally approved appearance, a socially necessary self. The complexity of identity and the pressure to fulfill multiple roles, can cause women to present a variety of faces in the public sphere, from the assertive business woman, to the contented housewife.

This chapter deals with the currency in cosmetics, and the presentation of images of women. The studies on which the majority of this chapter is based are drawn from North American and European research. I was unable to find studies conducted in industrializing nations but these studies appear to reflect the ‘modern’ Singapore, based on personal observation



and interactions. The value of a pretty face in the Singapore society and how women adapt to the changing feminine role is part of the use of cosmetics on the personal level. The consumer society, a woman's identity and the desire for style are connected with the use of cosmetics as women see these products assisting them in the negotiation of the many roles and images in the complex social structure of Singapore.

### Face Value

In addition to being the mirror or mask of self, the face has a real currency in society. "First impressions may be deceptive or deficient but they are there, ... , and they constitute an important factor contributing to how we treat others and how others treat us" (Kaczorowski 1989:4). There is strong evidence of the influence of physical appearance on the socio-economic attainment in modern societies (Kaczorowski 1989). The value added through beauty, and the use of cosmetics by women, has been documented in a variety of studies. Photographs of women, with and without cosmetics, were presented and the women with cosmetics were assumed to be more capable and were the preferred candidate for employment (Synott 1989, Kaczorowski 1989, Cash 1990, Featherstone 1990, Jackson 1992). Facial beauty is also a status symbol, it enhances self esteem, contributes to social mobility, greater popularity and higher grades (Synott 1990). As one aspect of femininity, "a properly made-up face is, if not an entree, at least a badge of acceptability in most social and professional contexts" (Bartky 1988:71). The value added to a woman's professional and social currency through the use of cosmetics shows that the use of cosmetics creates more than just a pretty face - it translates into better jobs, more opportunity in marriage and social mobility.

Cosmetics, as with most commodities, contain images of lifestyle and self within each product. Cosmetics are beauty one can buy, the hidden idea of being one of the 'beautiful

people' (Bull and Rumsey 1988). Women use cosmetics to inscribe these images of beauty and self upon their faces:

"The surface of the body seems everywhere to be treated not only as the boundary of the individual as a biological and psychological entity but as the frontier of the social self as well. ... The adornment and public presentation of the body, however inconsequential or even frivolous it may seem to individuals, is for cultural purposes." (Turner 1993:15)

"Cosmetics are not only barriers, they are tribal codes which are as complex and superimposed as Chinese puzzles." (Angelogou 1970:7)

The identification of a cosmetic with a perception of self, allows women to define themselves through the use of cosmetics. The intersection of identity with cosmetics and the global images of beauty available through the media, have formulated global images of beauty which can be found on women's faces symbolizing the globalization of society. The lifestyles often associated with a product, the elegance, the high social class, or the sexuality are applied to the face, in hope, that this will transform the self.

### Cosmetics, Identity and Style

This section is concerned with how the images of femininity move from the social world to the commodity, and then finally onto a woman's face. The purchasing of a lipstick is far more than a tube of petroleum product. The lipstick contains more power, as a commodity it:

"acts on the consumer, endows him/her with perceived qualities which can be displayed in widening public contexts" (Tomlinson 1990:9)

"It is in the sphere of consumption that many will seek to express their sense of freedom, their personal power, their status aspirations" (Tomlinson 1990:6)

### Identity

The interconnectivity of identity with commodities and all that they symbolize is a growing branch of research into the modern consumer and how they identify with objects and images (Featherstone 1987, McCracken 1988, Tomlinson 1990). One of the ways in which a

product endows the consumer is through 'branding' the use of a certain brand of product for all the class and other qualities it contains. An example is the use of Isabella Rossolini (see Figure 5-1) as the image of the Lancome representative - using these cosmetics places the user in a certain group of women, a modern classical woman.<sup>46</sup> Other fashion statements are made by the wearers of *Levi's 501* jeans (see Figure 6-1, for *Levi's*, *Armani* and *DKNY* shirts) - in Singapore this is the 'brand' of the young adult as a resistance to the conservative uniforms of the school rooms<sup>47</sup>. As a result of this attachment of identity to consumer goods, lifestyle is often read from the commodities purchased and used.

There are three ways in which the fashion system (this includes clothing & cosmetics) transfers meaning to goods. First, the fashion industry attaches 'styles' to established cultural categories. The second method insures a certain amount of trickle down effect as women in other categories try to emulate the high style leaders. The third way in which the industry creates meaning for their goods is through the acquisition of trends from the fringes of society. These ways ensure that there is a continual flow of images and styles over time as women attempt to create images of their identities through clothes and cosmetics (McCracken 1988). The implication of this movement of fashion trends is toward a society without fixed status groups, that these images are for 'all' (Featherstone 1987). The result of this fashion system is mass individualism, conformity that changes. This grooming system is where the perceived individuality is contained in a style commodity, but due to the mass availability of the commodity the style images are opened to all. The desire to be an individual within a social

---

<sup>46</sup> Isabella Rossolini was dropped by Lancome in the spring of 1994, she was too old, at 41 years old.

<sup>47</sup> Although Singapore's daily average high temperature is 30 degrees Celsius, with an average of 85% humidity, the young people continue to dress in 'style' rather than comfort.

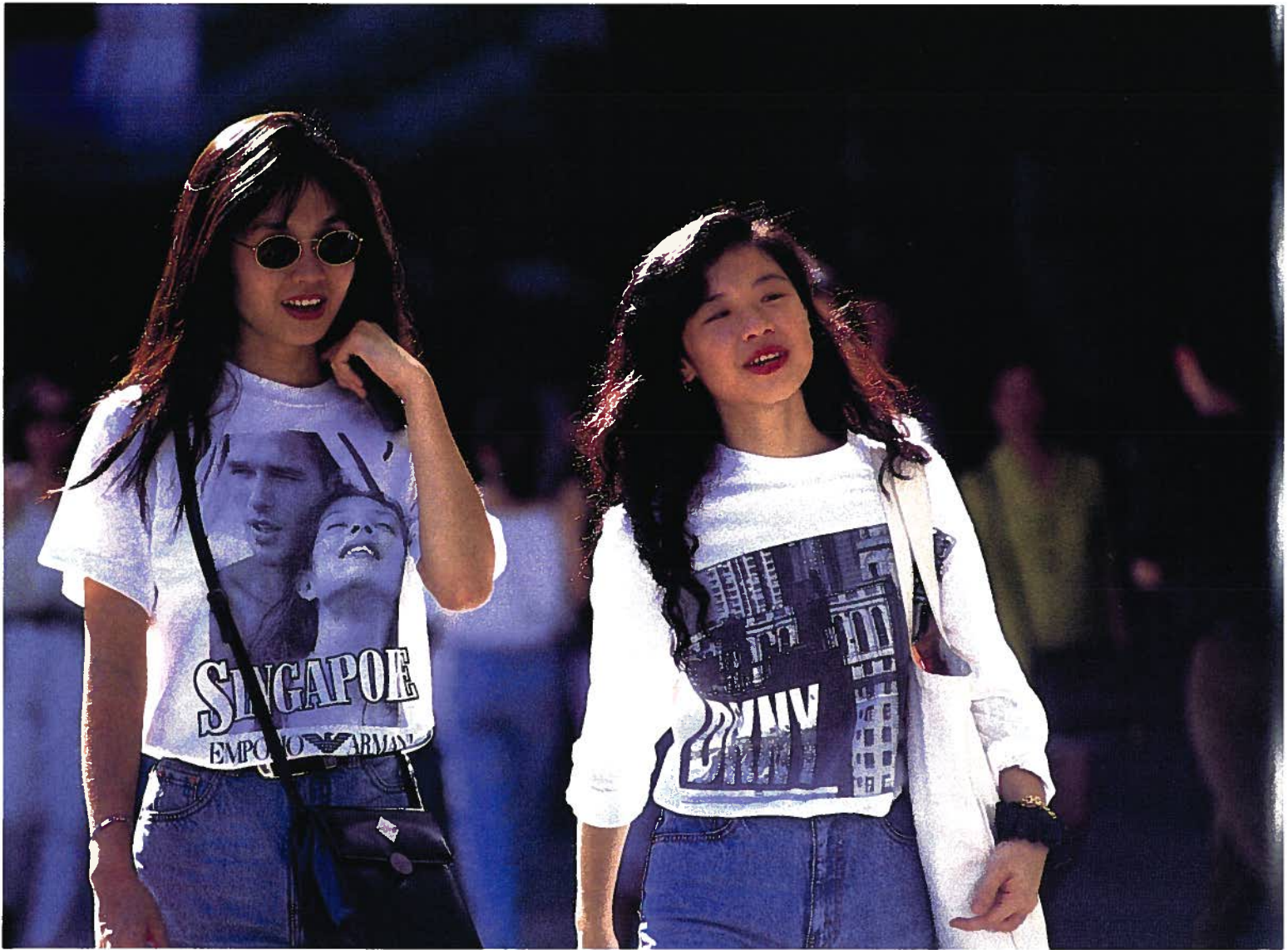


Figure 6-1: Global Brands: Levi's, Armani and DKNY worn by women in Singapore. (Lim 1993:38)

group supports this conformity that changes as the symbols of each group changes with the changing media images. For women this means changing hemlines and eyeshadows, where the first users set the trends and other women adopt the look to conform to the new image of beauty.

The transfer of social meanings from the fashion goods to the individual involves what can be called the grooming ritual. This ritual is used to transfer certain looks from the product to be lived on the individual consumer's body.

“The language with which advertisements describe certain make-up, hair styling goods and clothing give tacit acknowledgment to the properties that can be got from goods through special grooming rituals.” (McCracken 1988:86)

The advertising images then are perceived to move from the product to the women's face when she applies the cosmetics. These products, and their promised images, are perishable cultural meanings and fade rapidly. These grooming rituals need constant monitoring and freshening up. The consumer who participates in these fashion and grooming rituals is trying to “complete the self” (McCracken 1988:86) to match the socially constructed images of women.

### Style and the self

Style is an important factor in the modern consumer culture. It is critical in the definition of self, a way of stating who one is. Style impacts the way that we understand society and it has come to comprise a basic form of information within our society.

The fashion and cosmetics industries are a large part of style. The demand for fashionable clothing and cosmetics emerge from the social practices around commodification, instead of from need (Lunt and Livingstone 1992). Brand name cosmetics firms use a changing image of women, from the innocent waif to the sultry siren, to alter the cosmetics offered. The continual reinvention of fashions and colour palettes are class and style based. In this way style is constantly reinvented, maintaining class divisions (Ewen 1990).

The purchase and wearing of cosmetics is a highly visible method of stating who each person is and where they are placed in society. The personal identity in the modernizing society is based more on lifestyle and image, than on social class defined by wealth alone, and the fashion system permits a clearly visual statement of identity to society. Within this system of consumption there is room for expression of personal resistance or political consciousness. The individual is able to create opportunities for working out their identity in the new consumer based culture:

“The construction of personal identities draws on conventionally given class, gender, cultural and generational identities as well as an individual’s biographical and family experience. ... These identities give meaning to the everyday economic activities and experiences.” (Lunt and Livingstone 1992:24-5)

The categories of housewife, wife, mother, working woman, teenager, and girl are socially constructed and there are power relations embedded in these defined identities which constrain the strategies that women employ in negotiating their personal identities. “Through such negotiations the gender ideologies are themselves reproduced” (Lunt and Livingstone 1992:23). Women and their social identities are produced and reproduced through the negotiations for identity and the fashion system is one area of negotiation.

The social identities women negotiate from the use of consumer products affect different social spheres, from marriage and love to the position of aging in society (Featherstone 1991). Women are asked to incorporate multiple images, with fashion as the communicator and symbol (Ewen 1988). The images and perceptions of women and their position within their social class and society in general are read from their use of consumer goods. They are isolated if they do not conform to the positions and are trivialized for their constant attention to consumption. For women the negotiating of identity through consumer goods is a ‘no win’ situation.

## Global Beauty

“The fantasy of the Good Life populated by Beautiful People wearing The Look has seized the imagination of much of the world. This Western model of beauty represents a mandate for a way of life for women throughout the world regardless of how unrelated to each of our ethnic or economic possibilities it is.” (Chapkis 1986:37)

The global images of beauty influence women’s perception of the role of beauty and femininity in daily life for women. The use of made-up women to sell products as disparate as cars and air travel is part of the commodification of women’s bodies by the mass media, and this can be related to the positioning of women in society. Through the media, society perceives and projects roles for women.<sup>48</sup> The normalized, global, feminine identity perpetually exerts pressure on all women to succumb to the global standards of beauty and these images are almost impossible for women to attain (Bartky 1988). Women have been the carriers of traditional fashion culture through their dress and adornment, the global fashion industry has the effect of de-culturalization on women in the newly industrializing societies (Sawchuk 1988). In this way the historical adornment of the face is replaced with the global images of feminine beauty, and the cultural standards shift to a more global perception of beauty.

In April Fallon’s work on body image and culture she concludes that “one’s body image includes his/her perception of the cultural standards” (1990:80). The way a woman matches these standards and how important they are to her socio/cultural group will determine how effective these standards are in asserting an image of femininity.<sup>49</sup> Cosmetics and their application are part of the process by which the ideals of femininity are constructed and the

---

<sup>48</sup> For more on the media and beauty see: Chapkis 1986, Fallon 1990, Wolf 1991, and Cross 1993

<sup>49</sup> Femininity is a “set of structures and conditions which delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by women themselves” (Young 1989:54). What is feminine in each society must be defined within the specific context, thus what is feminine is part of the historical, cultural, social and economic existence in which the women live.

acceptance of these 'ideal' images as goals of femininity by women in Singapore are tied up in the changing roles for women being pressed by the current government.

### Beauty in Singapore

Femininity in Singapore is a result of the unique combination of cultures and the history of the island. What is feminine in Singapore today is defined by the past and the present. The desire to retain the 'good old days' and the desire to move into the 'global century' create two different social demands for women and form two versions of the feminine in Singapore. The global dress-for-success and blue jeans, and the local ethnic apparel of the *sari*, *sarong*, and the *cheongsam* are two ways that the global and the local are present in daily life in Singapore.

Women receive messages to be global and local through the promotion of these two versions of women's apparel. The liberated working woman is to be successful and competent, the wife and mother are to be absorbed in their domestic duties to maintain the image of the Asian family values so dominant in the government rhetoric.

### **Power and Beauty**

Beauty enhances the power of women, even while diminishing it. Beauty is a primary source of social of social influence and it is paradoxically a major cause of female weakness (Freeman 1986). Women are caught between incompatible concepts, beauty rituals reinforce the 'femininity' ideals and are currency in social and work mobility. The control of the beauty myth by the cosmetics and fashion industry, plays on women's insecurity and her necessities of life.

The normalizing of the female body is when the 'ideal' is an ongoing inscription of power on the body which is ever-changing (Bordo 1993). Cosmetics are an integral part of this inscription, as the ideal face is ever changing from season to season and from one age to the next. The industry changes the ideal ever so slightly to create continual demand for their product, and



this way women are never able to match the images of women in the media. As long as women do not feel like they 'measure up' to the ideals, women are more likely to doubt themselves in many social, cultural and public spheres. Women have been divided and conquered; they are separated from each other through their 'beauty competition' and in this sense do not trust each other in other areas.

Jana Sawicki looked at power, feminism and the body using Foucault as the theoretical base. Sawicki (1991) found that the discipline over women's bodies was not with any one group but it was experienced as an internalized discipline. Bartky (1988) uses the same theoretical base to portrayed women and their obsession with their appearance as part of the panopticon<sup>50</sup> effect, where women have internalized the 'gaze' of men and now control their images to suit their perceived ideal. This non-located power creates the idea that women are only concerned with their appearance and that they are responsible for their obsession with 'looks' (Chapkis 1986, Bartky 1988, Faludi 1991, Wolf 1991, French 1992). This type of power and control is difficult to resist and it is important to look at "how individuals who are targets of this power can play a role in its constitution and its demise" (Sawicki 1991:14). Women by participating in the beauty rituals accept the meanings inherent in the products, but as women use the cosmetics to further their social and labour positioning they are also breaking down the current perceptions of the feminine.

When women use cosmetics and try conform to the images of beauty being transmitted in society, they are also portrayed as frivolous for their continued attention to superficial things. If women choose not to use cosmetics they are ostracized by other women and men as they are

---

<sup>50</sup> For more on the panopticon effect see M. Foucault (1979), and for more on the body and self see M. Foucault (1990). See McNay (1992) for Foucault, the body and feminism.

deemed un-natural. These contradictions in identities and images leave women with a difficult choice of how to resolve a need to fit in and the desire to be seen as an individual. The power of beauty and the lack of control of the 'ideal' images places women in a vulnerable position. Yet women still cling to the beauty myth because they feel that they ultimately gain power from beauty through the security of a familiar image, the pleasure of flattery, and as a way to attract and influence others (Freedman 1986).

In Singapore the need to conform is a part of social structure. As shown in Chapter 4, the state policies use internalized values to create images and roles for women that conform to the government's vision of the ideal woman. The ideal face in cosmetics advertisements project the global and local images for women and in this way the use of cosmetics obliterates the unique in each person and re-inforces the preferred conformity (Lakoff and Scherr 1984). Identity is imbedded with culture, social status, and economic opportunities and women conform to their perceived position within the social structure. The body itself is often seen as a reflection of the self and physical appearance is a reflection of the adoption of a socially constructed feminine ideal (Fallon 1990). Women and their perceived identities are enacted through the use of cosmetics and the desire to conform to the ideals of beauty.

In a beauty book called *The Asian Face* by Gloria Noda (1986), Asian women and their faces are globalized: "The face you present to the world, the first impression that people have of you, depends on your looks" (1986:9). Asian women are cautioned about how others will see them: "Making up, ..., gives you a chance to experiment with yourself, to define your personality in terms that other people respond to positively" (1986:9). "What you accomplish with facestyling is a more vibrant version of what you really are" (1986:10). Asian women are to be themselves, while making sure they conform to another's ideas of their identity. As women

negotiate the dialectic of local and global images of women, they use cosmetics to inscribe an image of the self on the face. Cosmetics and the made-up face, both homogenize and individualize as they are used to declared the person and the social self (Brownmiller 1984, Bordo 1991).

Women and their position in the globalization of Singapore is complex issue as the role of women are tied to the family values exhorted by the government and to the demand for skilled women to take part in the global economic system. The increased exposure to the global media has increased the perception that a woman's looks count. As part of the global process of consumption, the images which accompany products through the media have altered the perception of beauty and femininity in Singapore, women are thus pressured by local and global images of the ideal woman. These tensions of identity are tied to the perception of beauty and the use of cosmetics and they represents the adjustment women make to negotiate an image of the 'Asian woman' which fits into the 'modern' Singapore. How women balance these demands and the role of beauty in the formulation of their identity in society is part of the local/global dialectic being experienced by Singapore society.

#### Media and Beauty in Singapore

The mass media is a major communicator of femininity and beauty throughout the globe. The geographic variability of beauty has been reduced with the increased expansion of the mass media into the newly industrialized and developing countries. The media images are more likely to be uniform in their standards of beauty and femininity (Fallon 1990). The increasingly global image of beauty is a fantasy of the Western woman, a standard even Western women are unable to match. In what Chapkis (1986) calls the 'Americanization of media', the standards of beauty are portrayed as white, Western, and wealthy. The access to American television programs and

glamour magazines (except *Cosmopolitan*, as noted earlier) increases women's perception of what is beautiful and influences what society perceives as feminine.

Perceptions of self are derived from the many images of women on the TV, radio, advertisements and films. The expansion of global images of the body through the mass media has produced more uniform standards of beauty throughout the globe (Chapkis 1986, Fallon 1990). These homogenized media images normalize women's appearance, they are the models against which women are judged (Bordo 1993). Women actively use their looks to portray who they are in different situations and they learn these appearances through the mass media that presents global images, with local restrictions, in Singapore. The outgoing working woman of the 1970s, the superwoman of the 1980s and now the mother of the 1990s are all images the government choose to support in the media. The control of local access to global information, and the images of women chosen to be promoted, is part of the pressure that Singapore women receive from the state. The changing education and population policies, which affect women and their identities, reflect the changing government policies which are in turn reflected in the images of women available through the media. The juxtaposition of Singapore as the information hub of the region and the firm hand the government has in the media, creates an interesting dialectic in the identities of women portrayed in the media - are these selected images or are they the modern Global City images. Which images are women to identify with?

### **The Currency of Cosmetics**

Looks do count for women in marriage and in the workplace. Upward mobility from job or husband for women (and family) and new status of appearance makes crossing social class easier for women. Cosmetics are perceived to be a part of being one of the Beautiful People (Marwick 1988) and this global image of status has been perceived by Singapore women as part

of the 'modern' global city image. Before women can challenge the beauty myth, they need to understand the value society attaches to physical appearance (Davis and Fisher 1993). The use of cosmetics mediates a woman's position in society, where they can be used to show an assertive confident exterior, while inside remaining vulnerable and self doubting (Freedman 1986). They can also be used to present the passive and beautiful face, sought after by men in the selection of a partner. The benefits of cosmetics is a more marketable self, where the outer appearance is thought to be a reflection of the inner self (Featherstone 1990).

Women use their appearance to compete with other women as men use physical ability. In this respect the marriage market and the work force are two areas of competition for women in Singapore. The pro-natalist policies, and the push for women to participate in the global industries, opens up the competition for jobs and husbands. Women find that they are competing with women and men for jobs and competing with each other for men in the marriage market, this means that looks count more than ever. The following section of this chapter looks at the currency of beauty and cosmetics in the marriage market and in the work force.

#### Cosmetics and the marriage market

The 'norms' of beauty shape the perceptions and the desires of potential partners and employers (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986). Men have been found to view physical appearance as more important than women, where women looked for material resources (or their potential) as the most important factor when looking for mates or dates (Jackson 1992). The dating agencies in Singapore report that men are looking for women who are pretty, pleasant, not fat, younger, less -educated and earning less salary than themselves (*Straits Times* 21/1/93). Women have

been known to use their physical appearance to attract partners, whose social promise and subsequent social power far exceeded their own (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986, Freedman 1986).

The desire for social mobility is part of the reasoning behind women marrying, in the past arranged marriages were based on the potential improvement in social status. The free choice marriages, which accompanied the modernization of Singapore and the nuclear family based housing changes, created the personal relationship not present in the past. The modern marriage was based on individual choice of partner, and increasingly this was judged on a persons looks or material potential.

Changes in the Singapore government's population policies in the 1980s and the Great Marriage Debate<sup>51</sup> were followed by the formation of the Social Development Unit (SDU). This government unit was designed to be the modern matchmaker, to arrange social meetings for the persons that the government had decided were not marrying and having children. The first units were restricted to the graduate and 'O' level (university entrance) men and women who were under 30 years of age. The units make an effort to "encourage women to marry 'down' and men to marry 'up', and to persuade women to have more babies" (Lim 1993:65).

The tendency for Singapore men to prefer to marry women with less education than themselves is reflected by Helen Wang, of the SDU, when she said: "we ask our women to play softer, to play a little dumb if possible"(Balakrishnan 1989:38). The government reports that one quarter of secondary educated women and one third of tertiary educated women remain single

---

<sup>51</sup> The Great Marriage Debate was what the press labeled the reaction to the pro-natalist policy and to Lee's suggestion that polygamy might be a solution. "It took the Great Marriage Debate in the early 80s to really shake Singapore women out of their comfortable stupor and to remind them not to take their rights for granted." In 1986, when Lee Kuan Yew's suggestion that "led to a public outcry. The *Straits Times*' Forum Page was flooded with letters charging that the incentive schemes were unfair and elitist, and that polygamy was, to put it mildly, a 'retrogressive' step" (Lim 1993:87-88) One response to this debate was the formation of Aware.

“with few prospects for marriage in a society where men prefer their women to be young, pretty and not-so-well educated” (FEER 17/05/1990:52) The price of success: women graduates have become assertive and ambitious in their careers but men “may not mind marrying a woman graduate but they see no reason to put up with an assertive wife” (SDU 1992:8). As a result of these attitudes it is difficult for women who are well educated and active in their careers to find a life partner who accepts them as they are. The need to be ‘pretty’ to find a mate is not lost on most women. The value of beauty in the marriage market, where women compete for men is exacerbated by the social demands that women be passive and pretty.

The use of cosmetics to increase the ‘beauty quotient’ in the marriage market is because women:

“find they are returning to make-up as feminine camouflage, even as they continue to raise their expectations, they are saying that the competition not with men but for them is so intense that the historic lure of bold bright color and the teasing sexuality it signifies cannot as yet be abandoned.” (Brownmiller 1984)

The attention to women’s physical appearance is crystallized in the beauty pageant. As one young Singapore man felt: “having more beauty pageants may teach the Singapore girl to be more conscious about her looks” (*Straits Times* 23/2/91). These pageants are one way “women are encouraged to make themselves commodities for the marriage market” (Ward 1984).

Women are no longer the ‘object’ used to seal a family business arrangement through an arranged marriage, but women are still commodities in the marriage market as each woman must sell themselves, or an image of themselves.

#### Cosmetics and work

As women participate more in the labour force, they are increasingly in competition for job promotions and career placements, with other women and with men. Looks count more for women than men in career and job promotions (Freedman 1986). The growth in the

communication and service sectors and the growth of the number of women in the workforce have left women feeling “even greater pressure than ever before to pay the most meticulous attention to their personal appearance” (Marwick 1988). Women experience beauty not only as a social value but also as a monetary value (Jackson 1992). Women must conform to a dress code in almost all lines of work in Singapore.<sup>52</sup>

The currency of cosmetics in the business world, where a woman must present herself ‘well groomed’, is a double edged sword. Women who spend time with their make-up are treated better (Hanson & Reed 1986, Kaczorowski 1989, Synott 1990, Jackson 1992) and are more likely to get promotions, but they are also not taken as seriously as a man due to the ‘frivolous’ nature of the application of cosmetics (Freedman 1986):

“Most of them come to work with heavy make-up, fantastic hairstyles ..., which shows that they spend much of their time looking in the mirror. Yet they want equal pay for unequal work. Bah!” (Lim 1993:138)

Women need to be assertive and pushy in business but men don’t want them too serious: “I like it when a woman is cute and fun loving” said one Singapore man when asked about women in business for an article entitled “Singapore Girl” in the *Straits Times* (08/03/91). The contradictory messages from men in the workplace, places women and their use of cosmetics in a double bind, they are educated to take their equal position in the economic sphere, yet are unable to leave the feminine in the domestic sphere. The carry over of femininity from the domestic to the public, requires discrete use of cosmetics to make a woman’s appearance acceptable in the business climate of Singapore.

---

<sup>52</sup> Most women in Singapore, through personal observation and conversation, wore skirts, hose, heels, cosmetics, and jewelry to work. Even women in uniform work would dress to travel to work and then change into their uniform.



## Conclusion

For most women in Singapore the negotiation of identity in the local/global dialectic includes the presentation of different faces through the application of cosmetics. The women are not just victims of their positioning in society, they actively resist and agitate for change in the social roles being defined by the government. They make choices about what and how they react to the pressures of social roles. The use of cosmetics can be part of the camouflage of the self in public for a woman, while retaining her identity in private (Bartos 1989, Pringle 1989, Davis 1993). They can also be used as acceptance to the socially preferred roles for women. Women use different strategies as they progress through their lifecycle, the decisions about cosmetics use will depend on what stage of life a woman is experiencing. What most women agree on is that the application of cosmetics is to present a facade to the outside world (Bartos 1989). The young university student, the wage earner, the wife and mother are all stages a woman experiences which are socially constructed. Through the presentation of the appropriate 'face' a woman is able to travel the paths of her life with less difficulty, by compartmentalizing life by appearance (Bartos 1989, PCs).

This chapter was concerned with how women use cosmetics in different social spheres in Singapore. The rapid change in social demands upon young women in Singapore has resulted in tensions of identity. The uses of cosmetics as 'value added' in the marriage and work markets are but two examples of the ways that global beauty has been appropriated for local use, to fulfill the local roles and to present 'proper' faces at the local/global interface. Women were shown as active participants in the decision making processes involved in the use of cosmetics and women's position in society.

## Conclusion

This thesis explored the question of identity and beauty in Singapore. The demand for female labour force participation, the perceived need for more ‘talented’ children, and the housing situation were all explored as areas of social engineering that contained preferred images of women and their role in society. As the Singapore government formulated policy in the social realm women found themselves pushed and pulled to alter their identities in the workplace, the family home and as an individual, to match the desired roles. Cosmetics use was selected as an example to explain part of women’s negotiation of identity in this changing environment.

Cosmetics are, on one hand, part of the globalization of the economic system and, at the same time, a major part of the daily practices of beauty and femininity in Singapore. I have demonstrated that many of the tensions in the perceived role of women were due to the rapid changes in the economic, political, and social structures over the past thirty years. Women use the cosmetics to create images of self that mediate the ‘normal’ images of women in Singapore society.

The well groomed Singaporean woman has the ability to use cosmetics to better her career and marriage chances in a highly competitive environment. The images women create, through the use of cosmetics, are in response to the pressures experienced on a day-to-day basis by the women. The social construction of women and femininity/beauty was chosen as just one part of the local/ global dialectic experienced in Singapore, where women use cosmetics as one means to negotiate their identities in the complex social landscape.

By looking at the processes often associated with modernization, I showed the effects of integration in the world system on women and their role in society. Women were interconnected with the government's plan for industrialization through their marketability in the global investment sphere. The image of a Global City showed how the Singapore government utilized the global image for instituting local controls. This image made participation in the labour force a national duty for women, as the economic survival of the nation was at stake.

The image of Singapore as a completely integrated and modern information centre was countered by the exploration of many restrictions on local society in chapter three. The government's local controls were portrayed as necessary for Singapore to participate in the global economic system and were shown as the backdrop against which women perceive their role in society. In this chapter I have shown how tangled the idea of a Singapore identity is, from the political rhetoric of 'survival' to the dual language policies. From this search for national identity, the imagination of Singapore women was drawn into the political and economic states.

The added pressures of the government's social engineering made the negotiation of personal identity difficult in this modern urban state. The control of the media, the education system and the social behaviours of the populace result in a seemingly well behaved city state. Chapter four disclosed the tangled web of pressures that influenced identity in the Singapore society for women. The complexity of life for women was shown through the many legislative changes effecting women's role in society. The tensions created through these "mixed messages" (Goldberg 1987) and the division of women within society were juxtaposed to the global open image of the Global City.

The use of cosmetics to formulate a strategy of survival in this landscape was the avenue of investigation in the final chapters of this thesis. Cosmetics firms are part of the multinational

corporations that expanded into the developing countries in the 1960s and 1970s and the global nature of these companies was reinforced by the messages symbolized in their advertising and products. The spread of cosmetics was assisted by the feminine images being portrayed by countries such as Singapore to attract foreign investment. The role of beauty and femininity in the social landscape increased in the 1980s as women are re-directed to the domestic sphere, with the family and children as their primary focus. In the 1980s and 1990s, the cosmetics industry's message was the same the world over - cosmetics were a necessity, and needed to express self, lifestyle, and to create images appropriate to social roles.

The increase in cosmetics consumption showed how linked Singapore was to the global consumer culture. The desire to be modern, and the femininity symbolized by the cosmetics, makes them an accepted part of the Singapore consumer culture. Women who sell cosmetics were shown as integrated in the global beauty business as users, promoters and sellers. These women use the business to better their economic position, while they appear to be endorsing the state's local image of women.

For most women in Singapore the negotiation of identity in the local/global dialectic includes the presentation of different faces through the application of cosmetics. It was revealed that through the presentation of the appropriate 'face' a woman was able to travel the paths of her life with less difficulty, by compartmentalizing life by appearance (Bartos 1989). This research has disclosed that women were not merely victims of their social positioning, through cosmetics they were able to negotiate space in the social roles being defined by the government. Women made choices about what and how they respond to the social roles at the different stages of their lifecycle through the use of cosmetics and images of the feminine.

This research has shown that in Singapore, women respond to both internal and external influences when making choices about their identity (or identities) as they participate in the global economic system while maintaining the domestic sphere as desired by the local society. Global influences and the government's social engineering continue to shape and reshape women (and society) as Singapore proceeds with its modernization, through industrialization and the expansion of value added services. This thesis was a preliminary look into women's negotiation of the local/global interface in Singapore. It explored the complex web of politics and the social structures in Singapore that comprise the landscape women travel as they seek a path of compromise between different images of women. The value of beauty and the ability of Singapore women to use cosmetics for personal control demonstrates that women are agents in their own destiny as their future opens in Singapore.

## Reference List

- Agarwal, Bina. 1988. "Patriarchy and the 'Modernizing' State: an Introduction" in Structures of Patriarchy. ed. Bina Agarwal. London: Zed Books. pp. 1-28.
- Angelogou, 1970. History of Make-Up. London: Studio Vista.
- Andrews, John. 1991. The Asian Challenge. London: Longman.
- Armstrong, W. and T. G. McGee. 1985 Theatres of Accumulation. London: Methuen.
- Ash, Mary Kay. 1986. Mary Kay. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986V. Mary Kay, Harvard speech. New York.
- Aware (Association of Women for Action and Research). 1988. The Singapore Woman. Singapore: Aware.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. Awareness: A Journal of AWARE. Volume 1, Issue 1, May 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986 Aware News. August 1986.
- Balakrishnan, N. 1989. "The State as Cupid" in Far Eastern Economic Review. 31/08/1989. p. 38.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Fear of English" in Far Eastern Economic Review. 19/11/1992, p. 28.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. "Espirit de core" in Far Eastern Economic Review. 07/02/1991, pp. 27-28.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990b. "The Lost Generation" in Far Eastern Economic Review. 15/10/90 p. 35.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990a. "Stake in a City State" in Far Eastern Economic Review. 20/09/1990. p. 104.
- Ban Kah Choon, Anne Pakir, and Tong Chee Kiong (eds.). 1992a. Imagining Singapore. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992b. Introduction to Imagining Singapore. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 1 - 8.

- Ban Kah Choon. 1992. "Narrating Imagination" in Imagining Singapore eds. Ban Kah Choon, Anne Pakir, and Tong Chee Kiong. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 9-25.
- Bartky, S. L. 1988. "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" in Feminism and Foucault. eds. I Diamond and L Quinby. Boston: Northeastern University Press. pp. 61-86.
- Bartos, Rena. 1989. Marketing to Women Around the World. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Blum, Jeffrey. 1984. "Meritocracy: The Ideological Dimension" in Designer Genes: IQ, Ideology and Biology, ed. Chee Heng Leng and Chan Chee Khoo. Selangor: Institute of Social Analysis. pp. 84-103.
- Blumberg, Rae Lesser. 1988. "Income Under Female Versus Male Control" in Journal of Family Issues, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 51-84.
- Bordo, Susan. 1993 Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991 "Material Girl" in Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance, eds. Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis. Rutgers State University Press. pp.
- Borthwick, Mark (ed.). 1992. Pacific Century. Boulder: Westview.
- Bramham, Daphne. 1994a. "Minister regrets giving women equal education" in The Vancouver Sun, 29/04/94, A12.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994b. "Safe, clean and repressive" in Vancouver Sun 09/04/1994, B3.
- British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 1990. The Intelligent Island.
- Brownmiller, Susan. 1984. Femininity. New York: Linden Books.
- Bull, Ray and Nichola Rumsey. 1988. The Social Psychology of Facial Appearance. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Burke, Peter. 1993. "Res et verba: Conspicuous Consumption in the Early Modern World" in Consumption and the World of Goods. eds. John Brewer and Ray Porter. New York: Routledge. pp. 148-161.
- Cash, Thomas H. 1990. "The Psychology of Physical Appearances, Aesthetics, Attributes, and Images" in Body Images: Development Deviance and Change. eds. Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Prinzinsky. New York: The Guilford Press. pp. 68-79

- Chan Chee Khoon and Chee Heng Leng. 1984. "Singapore 1984: Breeding for Big Brother" in Designer Genes: IQ, Ideology and Biology, ed. Chee Heng Leng and Chan Chee Khoon. Selangor: Institute of Social Analysis. pp. 4-13.
- Chan Heng Chee. 1993. "Singapore: Coping with Vulnerability" in Driven by Growth: Political Change in the Asia-Pacific Region, ed. James W. Morley. London: M.E. Sharpe. pp. 219-241.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1975. "Politics in an Administrative State: Where has the Politics Gone?" in Trends in Singapore, eds. Seah Chee Meow. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 51-68.
- Chang Chen-Tung, Ong Jin Hui, and Peter S.J. Chen. 1980. Culture and Fertility: The Case of Singapore. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Chapkis, Wendy. 1986. Beauty Bound: Women and the Politics of Appearance Boston: South End Press.
- Chee Heng Leng. 1988. "Babies to Order" in Structures of Patriarchy, ed. Bina Agarwal. London: Zed Books. pp. 164-174.
- Chen, Peter S.J. 1980 "The Cultural Implications of Industrialization and Modernization" in Culture and Industrialization: An Asian Dilemma, eds. Rolf E. Vente and Peter S.J. Chen. Singapore: McGraw-Hill International Book Company. pp. 115-134.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. "Singapore's Development Strategies: A Model for Rapid Growth" in Singapore: Development Policies and Trends. Singapore: Oxford University Press. pp. 3-26
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1977a. "Asian Values and Modernization A Sociological Perspective" in Asian Values and Modernization, ed. Seah Chee-Meow. Singapore: Singapore University Press. pp. 21-39.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1977b "Population Policy and Social Science Research on Population in Singapore" in Sociology Working Paper No. 60. Singapore: Chopmen Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978. "Development Policies and Fertility Behaviour: The Singapore Experience of Social Disincentives" in Southeast Asian Affairs 1978. Singapore: Heinemann. pp. 245-256.
- Chen, Peter S. J., Eddie C. Y. Kuo and Bette Jamie Chung (eds.). 1982. The Dilemma of Parenthood Singapore: Maruzen Asia Pte. Ltd.
- Chua Beng Huat. 1989. "The Business of Living in Singapore" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore, eds. K. S. Sandhu and P. Wheatley. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 1003 - 1021.



- Chua Beng Huat and Eddie C. Y. Kuo. 1991. "The Making of a New Nation: Cultural Construction and National Identity in Singapore" Working Paper 104, Department of Sociology. Singapore: National University of Singapore.
- Clammer, J. 1985. Singapore, ideology, society, culture. Singapore: Chopman.
- Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1979. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Consumer's Association of Penang (CAP). 1986. Selling Dreams: How Advertising Misleads Us. Penang: Sun Printers Sdn. Bhd.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. Abuse of Women in the Media. Penang: CAP.
- Corbridge, Stuart. 1986. Capitalist World Development. London: Macmillan.
- Cross, Gary. 1993. Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture. London: Routledge.
- Cua, Genevieve. 1988. "All is Not Vanity" in Singapore Business, 12(2). pp. 8-14.
- Davis, Kathy. 1993. "Cultural Dopes and She-Devils: Cosmetic Surgery as Ideological Dilemma" in Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance, eds. Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis. Rutgers State University Press. pp. 23-47.
- Davis, Kathy and Sue Fisher. 1993. "Power and the Female Subject" in Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance, eds. Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis. Rutgers State University Press. pp. 3-21.
- Department of Statistics, Singapore. 1991. Census of Population 1990: Advance Data Release. Singapore: National Printers.
- Department of Statistics, Singapore. 1993. Yearbook of Statistics, Singapore 1992. Singapore: National Printers.
- Department of Statistics, Singapore. 1990. Report on the Household Expenditure Survey 1987/88. Singapore: National Printers.
- Elson, Diane and Ruth Pearson. 1981. "The Subordination of Women and the Internationalisation of Factory Production" in Of Marriage and Market. eds. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullag. London: CSE Books. pp. 18-40.
- Ewen, Stuart. 1990. "Marketing Dreams: The Political Elements of Style" in Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings and the Packaging of Pleasure. ed. Alan Tomlinson. London: Routledge. pp. 41-56.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture. New York: Basic Books Inc.
- Ewen, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. 1992. Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER). 1994. Asia 1994 Yearbook: A review of the events of 1993. Hong Kong: FEER.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Save as you Spawn" in Far Eastern Economic Review. 17/05/1990. pp. 52-53.
- Fallon, April. 1990. "Culture in the Mirror: Sociocultural Determinants of Body Image" in Body Images: Development Deviance and Change. eds. Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Prinzensky. New York: The Guilford Press. pp. 80-109.
- Faludi, Susan. 1992. Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women. New York: Doubleday.
- Featherstone, Mike. 1991. Consumer Culture and Post Modernism. London: Sage.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990 "The Body in Consumer Culture" in The Body. ed. Mike Featherstone, M. Hepworth and B. S. Turner. London: Sage Publications. pp. 170-196.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. "Lifestyle and Consumer Culture" in Theory, Culture and Society, Vol. 4. London: Sage. pp. 55-70.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. Discipline and Punish. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan. Harmondsworth: Penquin.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990 History of Sexuality, vol. 1. Translated by R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
- Freedman, Rita. 1986. Beauty Bound. Lexington: Lexington Books..
- French, Marilyn. 1992. The War Against Women. New York: Summit Books.
- Giddens, A. 1988 "A reply to my critics" in Social Theory of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and his critics. eds. David Hald and John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 249-301.
- Goldberg, Suzanne. 1987. "Mixed Messages: Public Policy and Women in Singapore" in Commentary, Vol. 7, Nos. 2 & 3. pp. 25-37.

- Grossman, Rachel. 1979. "Women's Place in the Integrated Circuit" in Changing Role of Southeast Asian Women, Special joint issue of Southeast Asia Chronicle and Pacific Research. pp. 1-25.
- Hansen J. and E. Reed. Cosmetics, Fashion and the Exploitation of Women. New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Hatfield, Elaine and Susan Sprecher. 1986. Mirror, Mirror...: The Importance of Looks in Everyday Life. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Heyzer, Noleen. 1980. The Peripheral Workforce: Young Women and Migrant Workers in Singapore. Occasional Paper No. 5, South East Asian Studies Committee. James Cook University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. Women in Southeast Asia: Development, Subordination and Emancipation. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Ho Wing Meng. 1989. "Value Premises Underlying the Transformation of Singapore" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. pp. 671-691.
- Inkeles, Alex. 1983. Exploring Individual Modernity. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jackson, Linda A. 1992. Physical Appearance and Gender: Sociobiological and Sociocultural Perspectives. New York: State University of New York Press.
- James, Jeffrey. 1993. Consumption and Development. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Jary, David and Julia Jary. 1991. Sociology: The Harper Collins Dictionary. New York: Harper Collins.
- Johnston, R.J., Derek Gregory, and David M. Smith. 1986. The Dictionary of Human Geography, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Kau Ah Keng and Charles Yang. 1991. Values and Lifestyles of Singaporeans: A Marketing Perspective. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Kaye, Barrington. 1960. Upper Nankin Street. Singapore: University of Malaya Press.
- Kaczorowski, Janusz. 1989. The Good, the Average and the Ugly. Masters thesis, McGill University. unpublished.
- Kleinfield, Sonny. 1986. Staying at the Top. New York: New America Library.

- Koh Tai Ann. 1987a. "There's No Need to Regret Treating Women as Equals" in Commentary Vol. 7, Nos. 2 & 3. pp. 135-136.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987b. "Who's Managing the Home?" in Commentary, Vol. 7, Nos. 2 & 3. pp. 130-134.
- Koh Tai Ann and Vivienne Wee. 1987. "Women's Choices, Women's Lives" in Commentary, Vol. 7, Nos. 2 & 3. pp. 1-4.
- Kuah Khun-Eng. 1990. "Confucian Ideology and Social Engineering in Singapore" in Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 20, No. 3. pp. 371-383.
- Kumar, Sru. 1992. "Singapore 1991: Towards New Horizons" in Southeast Asian Affairs 1992. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 281-298.
- Kuo, Eddie and Aline Wong 1979. "Some Observations on the Study of Family Change in Singapore" in The Contemporary Family in Singapore, eds. Eddie Kuo and Aline Wong. Singapore: Singapore University Press. pp. 3-14.
- Lakoff, Robin Tolmach and Racquel L. Scherr. 1984. Face Value: The Politics of Beauty. Boston Routledge.
- Lau Kak En, Superintendent of Census. 1992a. Demographic Characteristics, Statistical Release 1, Singapore Census of Population 1990. Singapore: National Printers.
- Lau Kak En, Superintendent of Census. 1992b. Households and Housing, Statistical Release 2, Singapore Census of Population 1990. Singapore :National Printers.
- Lau Kak En, Superintendent of Census. 1993. Literacy, Languages Spoken and Education, Statistical Release 3, Singapore Census of Population 1990. Singapore: National Printers.
- Lee, Edwin. 1989. "The Colonial Legacy" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 3-51.
- Lee Kuan Yew. 1982. "The Search for Talent" (1982 National Day Speech given to the NTUC) in Our Heritage and Beyond. Singapore: NTUC. p. 13-23.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1971. Everyday Life in the Modern World, translated by Sacha Rabinovitch. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Leifer, Michael. 1990. "Triumph of the Will" in Far Eastern Economic Review 15/11/1990. pp. 27-30.
- Liggett, Arlene and John Liggett. 1989. The Tyranny of Beauty. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

- Lim Chee Then. 1992. "The Confucian Tradition and its future in Singapore: Historical, Cultural and educational perspectives" in Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore. ed. Yong Mun Cheong. Singapore: Times Academic Press. pp. 204-240.
- Lim, Jenny Lam (ed.) 1993. Voices and Choices: The Women's Movement in Singapore. Singapore: Singapore Council of Women's Organizations and Singapore Baha'i Women's Committee.
- Lim, Linda Y.C. 1982 Women in the Singapore Economy. Singapore: NUS Economic Research Centre.
- . 1983. "Capitalism, Imperialism, and Patriarchy: The Dilemma of Third World Women Workers in Multinational Factories" in Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor. eds. June Nash and Patricia Fernandez Kelly. Albany: State University of New York Press. pp. 70-91.
- . 1989. "Social Welfare" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 171-199.
- Lim, Linda and Pang Eng Fong. 1986. Trade, Employment and Industrialization in Singapore. Geneva: ILO.
- Lim Mei Mei. 1990. "What on Earth can we do?" in Vantage, April 1990. pp. 28-30.
- Ling, Trevor. 1989. "Religion" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 692-709.
- Low, Linda, Toh Mun Heng, Euston Quah and David Lee. 1993. "Economic Participation" in Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change. (eds.) Wong Aline K. and Leong Wai Kum. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 86-124.
- Lunt, Peter K. and Sonia M. Livingstone. 1992. Mass Consumption and Personal Identity. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McCracken, Grant. 1988. Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- McDonald, Hamish. 1990. "Bricks and Babies" in Far Eastern Economic Review, p. 25.
- McGee, T.G. 1987 "Mass markets - little markets: a call for research on the proletarianization process, women workers and the creation of demand" in Geography and Gender in the Third world. eds. Janet Momsen and Janet Townsend. Albany: SUNY Press. pp. 355-358.
- McNay, Lois. 1992. Foucault and Feminism. Oxford: Polity Press.

- Marwick, Arthur. 1988. Beauty in History. London: Thames and Hudson
- "Masks off an industry staple" 1986/87. Retailer, NA. November - January. pp. 4-9.
- Mason, Roger S. 1981. Conspicuous Consumption: A Study of Exceptional Consumer Behaviour. Hampshire: Gower.
- Miller, David. 1987. Material Culture and Mass Consumption. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Milne, R.S. and Diane K. Mauzy. 1990. Singapore: The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Ministry of Labour, Singapore. 1993. Report on Wages in Singapore 1992. Singapore: National Printers.
- Moc Nam-Ow. 1977. Only Awhile The Mountain Sleeps: The Story of Woman and a Look at the Singapore Girl. Singapore: Single Spark Creation Corner.
- Morris, David. 1994. "The Return of the City State" in Utne Reader No. 65. (Sept/Oct.). pp. 78-82.
- Noda, Gloria. 1986. The Asian Face. New York: Kondaisha International Ltd.
- Nolan, Peter. 1990. "Assessing Economic Growth in the Asian NICs" in Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 20, No. 1.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1987a "Disassembling Gender in the Electronics Age" in Feminist Studies, 13, No. 3 (Fall). pp. 609-626.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987b. Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Ow Chin Hock. 1984. "Singapore: Past, Present, and Future" in Singapore Twenty Five Years of Development, eds. You Pah Seng and Lim Chong Yah. Singapore: Oxford University Press. pp. 366-386.
- Pacific Century. 1992. Video 7: "Big Business and The Ghost of Confucius"
- Pakir, Anne. 1992 "English-Knowing Bilingualism in Singapore" in Imagining Singapore eds. Ban Kah Choon, Anne Pakir, and Tong Chee Kiong. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 234-262.
- Pang Cheng Lian. 1990. Singapore Island City State. Singapore: Times Edition Pte. Ltd.

- Parsons, Talcott. 1951. The Social System. London: Routledge.
- Pringle, Rosemary. 1989. Secretaries Talk. London: Verso.
- Purushotam, Nirmala. 1992. "Women and Knowledge/Power: Notes on the Singapore Dilemma" in Imagining Singapore eds. Ban Kah Choon, Anne Pakir, and Tong Chee Kiong. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 320-361.
- Puru Shotam, Nirmala. 1989. "Language and Linguistic Policies" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 503-522.
- Quah, J.S. 1987. "Public Bureaucracy and Policy Implementation in Singapore" in Southeast Asian Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 15, No. 2. pp.-95.
- Quah, J.S. and Stella Quah. 1989. "The Limits of Government Intervention" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 102-127.
- Quah, Stella. 1993. "Marriage and Family" in Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change. eds. Wong Aline K. and Leong Wai Kum. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 20-85.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. Between Two Worlds: Modern Wives in a Traditional Setting. Singapore Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990a. "Gender Roles, Family Roles and Health Behaviour: Pursuing the Hidden Link" in Southeast Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 18, No. 2. pp. 51-69.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990 b "The Social Significance of Marriage and Parenthood in Singapore: Policy and Trends" in The Family as an Asset, an International Perspective on Marriage, Parenthood, and Social Policy, ed. Stella Quah. Singapore: Times Academic Press. pp. 247-289.
- Quah, Stella, Chiew Seen Kong, Ko Yiu Chung and Sharon Mengchee Lee. 1991. Social Class in Singapore. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Reiger, Hans Christoph. 1989. "The Quality of Life in Singapore: A Foreigner's Reflections" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 1022-1047.
- Regnier, Philippie. 1991. Singapore: City-State in South-East Asia, translated from the French by Christopher Hurst. London: Hurst and Co.
- Rigg, Jonathan. 1991. Southeast Asia: A Region in Transition. London: Unwin Hyman Ltd.

- Rodan, Gary. 1993. "Preserving the one-party state in contemporary Singapore" in Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism eds. Hewison, Robison and Rodan. St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. The Political Economy of Singapore's Industrialization: Nation State and International Capital. London: MacMillan.
- Roschad, Zaimul Abidin Bin and Arun Mahizhnan. 1990. "The New Environment, the Young Singaporean and National Values" in In Search of Singapore's National Values, ed. Jon S. L. Quah. Singapore: Times Academic Press. pp. 80-90.
- Salaff, Janet. 1988. State and Family in Singapore: Restructuring a Developing Society. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Salaff, Janet and Aline Wong. 1984 "Women Workers: Factory, Family and Social Class in an Industrializing Order" in Women in the Urban and Industrial Workforce: Southeast and East Asia, ed. Gavin Jones. The Australian National University, Development Studies Centre, Monograph No. 33. pp. 189-213.
- Safilios-Rothschild, Constantina. 1982. "Female Power, Autonomy and Demographic Change in the Third World" in Women's roles and Population Trends in the Third World, eds. Richard Anker, Mayra Buvinic, and Nadia Youssef. London: ILO. pp. 117-132.
- Sandhu, K.S. and Paul Wheatley, eds.. 1989. Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Saw Swee-Hock. 1990. Changes in the Fertility Policy of Singapore. Singapore: Times Academic Press. Institute of Policy Studies, Occasional Paper No. 2.
- Sawchuk, Kim. 1988. "A Tale of Inscription: Fashion Statements" in Body Invaders: Sexuality and the Postmodern Condition, eds. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. London: Macmillan. pp. 61-77.
- Sawicki, Jana. 1991. Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body. New York: Routledge.
- Schuurman, Frans J. 1993. "Introduction: Development Theory in the 1990s" in Beyond the Impasse: New Directions in Development Theory ed. Frans J. Schuurman. London: Zed Books. pp. 1-32.
- Sen, Amartya. 1990. "Gender and Cooperative Conflicts" in Persistent Inequalities, ed. Irene Tinker. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 123-149.
- Sherwell, Philip. 1994. "Singapore girls too smart for guys" in The Vancouver Courier, 18/05/1994, p. 18.



- Siddique, Sharon. 1989. "Singaporean Identity" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 563-577.
- Singapore Trade Development Board. 1980-1992. Singapore Trade Statistics, Vol. V-X, Vol. I-V, Nos. 12.
- Singapore. 1991. Singapore: The Next Lap. Singapore: Times Editions Pte. Ltd.
- Singapore Tourist Promotion Board. 1993. Singapore: Official Guide. Singapore: Singapore Tourist Promotion Board.
- Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) . 1991. "Beauty and the Biz: Shooting Through the Roof" in Money Mind.
- Singh, Bilveer. 1992. Whither PAP's Dominance?: An Analysis of Singapore's 1991 General Election. Selangor: Pelanduk Publications.
- Siraj, Zaibun. 1987. "The Portrayal of Women in the English Newspapers in Singapore" in Commentary, Vol. 7 No. 2 &3. pp. 128-129.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. "Newspapers and Their Treatment of Women" in Awareness, June, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. "The Singapore Woman as Portrayed in Advertisements" in Commentary, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 76-80.
- Sklair, Leslie. 1991. Sociology of the Global System. London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.
- Social Development Unit (SDU). 1992. The Need for Social Development in Singapore. Singapore: National Printers.
- Stackhouse, John. 1994. "Confident region seeks 'Asian way'" in The Globe and Mail, 07/06/1994, A10.
- Synott, Anthony. 1989. "Truth and Goodness, Mirrors and Masks: A Sociology of Beauty and the Face, Part I" in The British Journal of Sociology, Volume 40, No. 4 December 1989. pp. 607- 636.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990 "Truth and Goodness, Mirrors and Masks: A Sociology of Beauty and the Face, Part II" in The British Journal of Sociology, Volume 41, No. 1 March 1990. pp. 55-76.
- Straits Times, no author, "A Singular Phenomenon", 16/08/1993

\_\_\_\_\_. "Buy, Buy Kids", 29/07/91 p.2.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Beauty Before Brains", 19/09/1991. p. 4

\_\_\_\_\_. "Dream Girl", 16/08/1993. p.3

\_\_\_\_\_. "Goh Report", 4/09/1984.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Ideal Husbands: Women go for financial security, men will choose pretty mates", 21/01/1993, p. 16.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Many find the proliferation of beauty contests a turn off", 23/02/91, p. 19.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Mind Behind The Body Shop", 24/06/93.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Perks for poor to encourage them to have small families", 16/08/1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. "PM Goh's National Day Rally", 16/08/93 p. 25

\_\_\_\_\_. "Singapore Girl", 08/03/91, p. 1.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The New Executive Face", 13/05/1993, p. 5.

Straits Times, no title or author, 09/08/89:15, 31/10/1983.

Tay, Mary W. J. 1992. "Language as a Mirror of Traditionalism and Modernization" in Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore. ed. Yong Mun Cheong. Singapore: Times Academic Press. pp. 102-135.

Tillman, Robert O. 1989. "The Political Leadership: Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP Team" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 53-69.

Tomlinson, Alan. 1990. "Introduction: Consumer Culture and the Aura of the Commodity" in Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings and the Packaging of Pleasure. ed. Alan Tomlinson. London: Routledge. pp. 1-38.

Turnbull, C. M. 1989. A History of Singapore, 1818-1988, 2nd Edition. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Turner, Terrence S. 1993. "The Social Skin" in Reading the Social Body. eds. Catherine B. Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press. pp. 15-32.

- Tu Wei-Ming. 1984. Confucian Ethics: The Singapore Challenge (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore). Singapore: Federal Publications.
- Vasil, Raj. 1989. "Trade Unions" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 53-69.
- Vente, Rolf E. 1980. "Industrialization as Culture" in Culture and Industrialization: An Asian Dilemma, eds. Rolf E. Vente and Peter S.J. Chen. Singapore: McGraw-Hill International Book Company. pp. 86-111.
- Vogel, Ezra F. 1989. "A Little Dragon Tamed" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 1049-1066.
- Ward, Kathryn B. 1984. Women In the World System: Its Impact on Status and Fertility. New York: Praeger.
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary. 1971. Springfield Mass.: G & C Merriam Co.
- Wee, Vivienne. 1987. "The Ups and Downs of Women's Status in Singapore: A Chronology of some Landmark Events (1950 - 1987)" in Commentary, Vol. 7, Nos. 2&3. pp. 5-12.
- Williams, Jeremy B. 1992 "Capitalist Development and Human Rights: Singapore Under Lee Kuan Yew" in Journal of Contemporary Asia. Volume 22, No. 3. pp. 360-372.
- Wilkinson, Barry. 1988. "Social Engineering in Singapore" in Journal of Contemporary Asia. Volume 18, No. 2. pp. 165-188.
- Wolf, Diane L. 1993. Factory Daughters: Gender, Household Dynamics and Rural Industrialization in Java. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wolf, Naomi. 1991. The Beauty Myth. Toronto: Vintage Books.
- Wong, Aline K. 1976. "Women As A Minority Group" in Singapore: Society in Transition, ed. Riaz Hassan. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. pp. 290-314.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1975. Women in Modern Singapore. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1980. Economic Development and women's Place. London: Change International Reports.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Sex Roles, Lifecycle Stages, Social Networks and Community Development in Singapore" in Persons and Powers of Women in Diverse Cultures, ed. Shirley Ardener. New York: Berg Publishing Ltd. pp. 159-171.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. "Planned Development, Social Stratification and the SDL in Singapore" in Women's Work, Development and the Division of Labor by Gender. eds. E. Leacock and H. Safa. New York: Bergin and Garvey. pp. 207-223.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. A Study of Female Workers in Transnational Electronics Firms in Singapore. Research Paper, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1981. "Planned Development, Social Stratification and the Sexual Division of Labor in Singapore" in Signs, Vol. 7, No. 2. pp. 434-452.
- Wong, Aline K. and Eddie C. Y. Kuo. 1979. The Contemporary Family in Singapore. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Wong, Aline K. and Leong Wai Kum (eds.). 1993a. A Woman's Place: The Story of Singapore Women. Singapore: The PAP Women's Wing.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993b. Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change. Singapore Times Academic Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993c. "Singapore Women: An Overview" in Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change. (eds.) Wong Aline K. and Leong Wai Kum. Singapore Times Academic Press. pp. 1-19.
- Wong, Aline and Ooi Giok Ling. 1989. "Spatial Reorganization" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 788-812.
- Wong Poh Poh. 1989. "The Transformation of the Physical Environment" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 771-787.
- Yap Mui Teng. 1989. "The Demographic Base" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore. eds. K.S. Sandhu and Paul Wheatley. Singapore: ISEAS. pp. 455-476.
- Yeo, Mary (Chuan-Hua). 1980. "The Cultural Implications of MNC for Singapore Women: An Exploratory Study" Department of Sociology, University of Singapore. Academic Exercise, unpublished.
- Yong Mun Cheong. 1992. "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore" in Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore. ed. Yong Mun Cheong. Singapore: Times Academic Press. pp. 56-77.
- Young, Iris Marion. 1989. "Throwing Like a Girl" in The Thinking Muse. eds. Allen Jeffner and Iris Marion Young. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 51-70.

Yu Yee Shoon. 1976. "The Singapore Woman" in Socialism that works ... The Singapore Way. ed. C.V. Devan Nair. Singapore: Federal Publications.

### **Interviews and Conversations**

BM, Mary Kay Beauty Consultant, Personal Interview July 1, 1993. Phone conversation June 27, 1993.

AT, Avon general manager, Personal Interview July 6, 1993. Phone conversations June 10, 17, 27 1993.

BH, Body Shop general manager, and SL Body Shop sales representative. Personal Interview July 9, 1993. Phone conversation June 27, 1993.

BT Mary Kay Distributor, Personal Interview June 16, 1993, July 1, 1993 and conversations June 10, 27 and August 7 1993.

PChong, general manager Cosmetiques de France, Personal Interview July 5, 1993.

PO, Business consultant, former owner of Guardian drugstore chain, pharmacist. Personal Interview July 1, 1993. Phone conversations June 27, July 8, 1993. Personal conversations July 3, 17, August 7, 1993.

ET, general manager Davidson Singapore Ltd., cosmetics distributor. Personal Interview July 18, 1993.

Dr. Stella Quah, Personal Interview July 20, 1993

Dr. Vivienne Wee, Personal Interview July 28, 1993.

PC, PN: Additional personal conversations, notes and observations were part of this research, to honour these persons privacy the abbreviations of PC, PN are used to reference these items.